ECLIPSE PHASE

FIREWALL

The Eclipse Phase Conspiracy Guide

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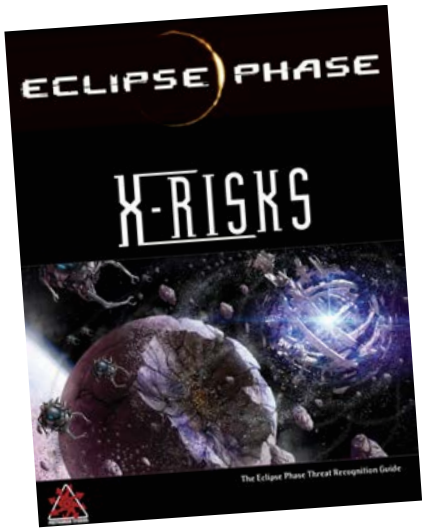

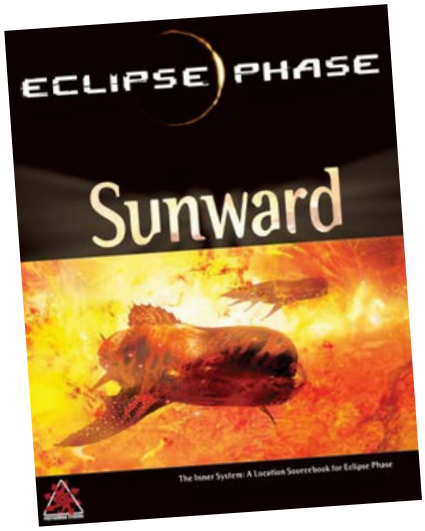

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FIREWALL

Firewall is a secret organization sourcebook for both players and gamemasters.

It includes:

- Details on Firewall's history, organization, and ongoing operations.
- Firewall's notable people, locations, and internal factions.
- Rival organizations, including the argonauts, Jovians, Titanians, and ultimates.
- New traits, gear, and 16 sample characters

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DIRECT ACTION vs. EXTINCTION

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NOSTRUM

This story continues the plot begun in El Destino Verde, *the opening fiction to* Panopticon.

"So you ain't surprised, guy we're going to see knows me by Jake Carter," Jae Park said.

"I don't care if he calls you Sun Mi Hee," Kim said, "As long as when we're done there we get a clean bill of health. Anyway, I like 'Jake' better. My grandpa was named 'Jae.'"

They were flying over the Noctis tablelands, heading for an off-grid genehacker facility. The badlands spread out invisible below them, but an AR topo display showing their position hovered over the central instrument panel. Rank of captain meant Sage Kim could requisition better engines than most Ranger prowlers had. They were cutting up sky; wouldn't take long to get there.

It was hours 'til dawn, but Cagehopper would be awake; the genehacker didn't sleep much. Even when he did, he kept a fork up to tend to his living experiments.

"What do you care if Bobdog and I get a clean bill?" Park asked, "You going all soft on me, Captain Kim?"

"No," she said, "But I wouldn't want to have to shoot you for coming up zombie, all the same." Her tone measured zero-percent sardonic wit.

"Wouldn't worry," Park said, "This is containment protocol. Pretty standard. Just a precaution." He said that, but he was covering. He had that itch in his neck, that crawling feeling in his stomach he always got after facing an exposure risk. The fear never went away, and that was a damned good thing. He'd seen more than a few researchers who got stupid about the exovirus shot into red smears on Firewall turn-and-burn ops. Hell, he'd done for a few himself, though he didn't savor it any.

"How you doing back there, Bobdog?" Park craned his head to check on the neo-primate. Bob huddled in the acceleration couch, breathing normally but looking gray.

Bobdog made the Warlpiri sign for "shit."

"Hang in there, man. We'll be at Cagehopper's soon."

Kim had locked her police baboons, Gloria and Smoke, in the back cabin. Too much chance of Smoke throwing a nicotine fit and tearing one of Bobdog's long, spindly neo-bonobo arms off. Park didn't like the baboons much, but they'd come in handy dealing with the yakuza back at El Destino Verde.

"Be interesting to finally meet Cagehopper," Kim said, real casual.

Well, shit, Park thought. "You know him?" he asked, keeping casual himself. He'd thought "Cagehopper" was a name the genehacker only used with Firewall. That she knew it set him on edge, but of more worry was the simple fact of a Ranger and a black-kettle genehacker being in the same room.

"Tried to arrest him a few times, sure."

"Complicates things," he said.

She reached over the center console and play punched his shoulder. Bit more than a play punch,

point of fact, but probably not intentional. Kim was a ruster, but her body was heavy on the augments. He'd give her even odds against your average fury. "Don't fret, Jake. I don't give so much as a rat's tail about this guy, so long as when we're done he tells me I'm not gonna end up a barrel-shaped mass of mucus membrane with tentacles for a tutu."

"Truly?"

"Truly."

He believed her, for now. Cagehopper was well outside her jurisdiction, but the guy got around. She probably knew him from his dealings with the Arsia Mons smugglers. Didn't matter, anyway; he had to bring her to Cagehopper one way or another.

* * *

Cagehopper's place was dug deep into a gorge in the tablelands. Kim's flying truck had to squeeze onto a landing pad that was way too close to the gorge walls for comfort. There were no trails, but there was a space between some rocks just big enough for a buggy to crawl out. The outer garage door blended into the surroundings almost perfectly thanks to a programmed coating of chameleon materials. He'd never have found the place by visual.

They were probably being watched already, not that you could spot any sensors. Cagehopper would have microdrones scattered around, and he might be hip to the Maker trick of using lizards as camera platforms.

An AR alert flashed up in Park's peripheral vision. *Telefono*.

[Carter? What the fuck, citizen? You're heavy a few bodies.]

[Heavy a few on account of we all got coughed on during the last run. Need you to take a look,] Park messaged.

[And you show up in a cop truck?]

Park messaged, [Look, you're not gonna like this, but my shotgun on this ride's a Ranger.]

[Perceptive, Carter. You're fucking right I don't like it. Not at all.]

[Look, Cage, I got Bobdog LaGrange here in a bad way, and we're all several of us exposure risks, right down to the baboo—]

[Baboons! Carter, you rock lizard's cloaca, I desire no fucking police baboons in my place of establishment.]

This reaction was cantankerous even for Cagehopper.

"Problem?" Kim asked.

"He doesn't like baboons. I didn't know."

She sighed. "They can stay in the prowler, long as we don't take too long."

Park thought about that. All in all, Kim'd been too acquiescing by half. Helping out bust a yakuza front, sure, all in a day's work. She was the law, right? But agreeing to go in and meet a guy who'd have a list of felonies for unlicensed genemods a klick long on his rap sheet without her monkeys … It was too even-handed, even for a Ranger like Kim. He'd have to watch her close.

[Cagehopper, how about this: the baboons'll stay in the prowler. They'll make nary a peep, unless it turns out we're infected. Then we need you to check them, too.]

A long chunk of dead air followed, but then the camouflaged garage door scrolled up into the rock face, letting a gust of warm humidity out to briefly fog the chill, dry Martian air.

Inside was a dimly lit loading bay. Cagehopper had a flying car and a buggy parked inside, leaving only a little space for the big Ranger flyer. The place was clean and orderly. Park saw a few rats, probably smart animals, scurry away as the garage door closed and he stepped out.

Park got Bobdog from the back seat, carrying the neo-bonobo again. Bobdog looked even weaker than before; he shivered in the cold air of the garage. Couldn't Cagehopper afford an airlock? But space was at a premium. Looked like it'd been part of an underwater cave system, formed back in the time when the Noctis tablelands were at the heart of a great, winding alluvial system. As they would be again, if Park and the rest of the TTO's army of terraforming workers had their way about it.

Kim got out and made cop eyes at the cave. "Not much for sensors in here," she observed.

"I think he figures anyone gets in the front door, he's already screwed," Park said.

"Public AR," Kim said, and started walking toward the back of the garage. Park flipped over to the lab's public AR channel himself. A trail of red dots led in the direction Kim was headed, so he followed.

[Stay on the path,] Cagehopper messaged.

After going through a decontamination airlock, they followed the red dots through a maze of narrow corridors cut into the rock. Cramped as the garage'd been, the rest of the place sprawled. They crossed dozens of silent, unlit intersecting passages and an equal number of heavily reinforced doors. The stone, rather than echoing, drank up their footsteps. Lot bigger than he'd expected after the cramped garage.

[What's he need all this space for?] Kim asked.

[Never wanted to know,] Park messaged back.

The dots ended at a heavy metal door that slid open to reveal a sparsely furnished octagonal chamber. In a circle of light cast by an overhead surgical fixture, several metal tables gleamed. A doctor bot stood motionless at the head of one, and several rolling tables of diagnostic equipment stood by the other two. Other than the tables, there was no place to sit.

Cagehopper came out of a sliding door on the far wall. "Sit on the tables," he said, and they did.

CAGEHOPPER ■ FIREWALL SENTINEL, BLACK KETTLE GENEHACKER

JAKE CARTER AKA JAE PARK ■ FIREWALL PROXY

SAGE KIM ■ FIREWALL RECRUIT, MARTIAN RANGER

His neo-neanderthal morph was shorter than Park or Kim, thick-browed, with a barrel chest and hands that looked like they could bust rock. Cage went to work. He injected Park with what he figured must be diagnostic nanomachines to do blood work, then took throat swabs and dropped them into a sequencer.

[What's he doing?] Kim asked Park.

[He'll work with all the displays visible only to him,] he messaged. [You can't risk someone with an advanced infection knowing you're on to them.]

Cagehopper took a swab from Bobdog, frowning at the treatment Bob's morph had taken, then dropped that swab in the sequencer, too.

"The hell happened to him, Jake?" Cagehopper asked.

Park said, "Yakuza using neoprimate parts for Traditional Chinese Medicine."

"I don't want to hear more." Cagehopper went back to work.

[Why's he even in the room with us?] she asked.

[Ain't his real morph. He's put up a different face every time I been here.]

"What kind of tests are you doing?" Kim asked.

Cage'd been scowling at an AR window. The outline of it was visible so that they could see he was reading, but to anyone but him, the contents were a misty blur. Without turning, he said, "Tossing your junk DNA, looking for jabberwockies. For starters."

Cagehopper got a bunch of tests running, then fixed up Bobdog a little. Once Cage'd put nanobandages on the worst of it, Bobdog put his hand to his throat and looked at the neanderthal. Park wondered how long severed vocal cords took to heal.

"I don't have a quick fix for that," Cagehopper said. "I can put you in a healing vat for a few days, or I can drill in some new implants and resleeve you."

Bobdog looked at Park and signed, "New body," in Warlpiri. Cagehopper glanced over at Park.

"Says he wants a resleeve," Park said.

"I'll trade you this one," Cagehopper said, patting his chest. "By the way … you're all clean."

"Good," said Kim, "I gotta talk to my people at the Ranger station."

Cagehopper scowled. "Hopefully not about me."

"Paranoia and egocentrism don't go so good together, paatno-san," she said, and left the room.

Cagehopper snorted and went back to prepping Bobdog for new mesh inserts.

"How you holding up, Bob?" Park asked, "Know it's a lot to ask, but I need you solid, or you're out."

"Can walk straight," Bobdog signed.

"What's he say?" Cage asked.

Park told him.

"Remind me never to leave my burrow for you, Carter," Cagehopper said.

* * *

"How you like the new morph?" Kim asked. They were flying back to the stop on the M5 where Park'd left his truck. The baboons hadn't crapped the seats; Kim looked to be in a good mood about that.

Bobdog was pretty animated for someone in a new morph, but then he'd had the benefit of Cagehopper having kept the engine warm for him instead of sleeving him into a morph that'd been packed in stasis gel. "All right. Not bad. Kind of, too human, you know? Clumsy toes."

"Yeah, I been in and then out of a bouncer," Park said.

They were making small talk, but they'd have to cut that off shortly and make with the planning. He'd gotten Eidolon, one of the crows, to analyze the data they'd grabbed from the yak front. The meat of it was an undecipherable record of shipping times and routing numbers. The rest was an operations manual for handling exsurgents and extracting bodily fluids from them without becoming contaminated oneself. The manual then went into how to store and package the fluids for shipment.

[You got anything yet, E?] Park messaged.

Eidolon's response came slowly; they were an AGI inhabiting a massive art installation outside Locus, in the Jupiter Trojans. Park had plenty of contacts rimward. He liked using hackers outside Consortium jurisdiction when he could.

[Yes, Jake. It is most distressing. The yakuza gang that Bobdog LaGrange discovered have been shipping their product to orbit, but I cannot deduce where. They are using combinatory routing codes.]

Park did a mesh search on what that meant. Combinatory routing codes were a form of encryption used when sending physical goods—which meant they didn't get used much. Parcels from multiple suppliers with combinatory codes on them would stack up at a routing center until all of them were there. Only by combining the codes on all parcels could you determine the final destination. Corps who didn't want competitors finding out where large quantities of components were being sent used them in the dark ages before microfacturing. Now they were mostly used by criminals.

Park patched Eidolon through the prowler's speakers. "Y'all should hear this," he said. "Eidolon, how do we figure out where the cylinders were going?"

After a long pause, Eidolon said, "You must find all of the facilities from which they were originating. Or you could simply go to the routing center, and if there are enough parcels there, I might be able to deduce both their origin points and the final destination by decrypting the collected routing codes from them."

"You know where the routing center is?" Kim asked.

After a long moment, Eidolon's reply came, "Of course. I only hesitated to provide the location because I feared I might have made an error in decrypting the code, but I have re-checked my work and am quite sure. It is a disreputable drinking establishment in the Zhongguancun neighborhood of Olympus City, on Mars. Sending you the precise address now."

"That don't sound like an error at all," Park said. An AGI not grokking the idea of a front business didn't surprise him. "Nice work, Eidolon. We'll talk again soon."

"Good day, Jake."

Kim said, "I can't do anything for you in Olympus, Carter."

"I can," Bobdog said, "I'll leave right away."

Bobdog LaGrange knew some helluv angry monkeys, Kim thought. Correction: apes. Never call 'em monkeys, especially not the ones Bobdog knew.

She was sitting on the end of a motel bed eating the leftover half of a bibimbap burrito. Park was laying back against the headboard behind her, smoking a joint. They were watching a tacnet replay on a shared AR window of Bobdog's friends in Olympus tearing up a speakeasy run by a local gang.

In the end, the apes found more cylinders and got the data. Whole back of the place had been set up for shipping and receiving. Trucks loaded with goods come in off the maglev railroad stopped at the front business on their way to the space elevator, left light some goods and heavy a batch of nondescript cylinders full of zombie plague. Rinse, repeat. The gang were contractors—knew fuck all about what they were really involved in. Just knew they were getting paid.

Strictly speaking, as a deputized officer, she ought to be concerned, but she'd have been surprised if the Olympus police didn't know about the place. That department had three priorities: the Space Elevator, ComEx property, and whomever was paying them bribes, in that order. Bobdog's neo-primate gang friends had done the Olympus cops' job better than the cops would've.

As for Jake Carter–or Jae Park, which was about the most boring real name a guy could have–she glanced back at him. "How long you think Eidolon'll take on that?"

He smiled. "You got somewhere to be?"

"I got a department to run, in case you'd forgot." Although the truth of it was, she regularly went a week without setting foot in the station. Running things via mesh was easy enough. Rank of captain in the Rangers basically meant being a beat cop but having to answer a crap ton of mesh calls, too. Oh, and she got a better truck.

As for Park … she wasn't sure this was going to happen again, but he hadn't been overly disappointing. Like all men, he needed to read the documentation; unlike the majority of them, he did what it said. She liked him. They were both Korean, they were *donggap*—born in the same year, they were both from agrodome families (from what she could get out of him about his history). And it'd been a while. She didn't fool around with co-workers, and most other men she met, she arrested.

"Hey, pause it and go back a couple seconds," she said. She'd noticed something on Bobdog's tacnet movie.

"Here, have the controls," Park said.

She shuttled back about a second and a half. There. "Hello again, cupcake," she muttered.

She zoomed. Cowering in one corner of the frame, doing a good job of looking terrified, was a scantily clad pleasure pod. Almost a dead ringer for the one at El Destino Verde—probably the same model year. And again, high rent for the establishment they were looking at.

Park let go a stream of musky smoke. "Well, shit."

"She ain't just a party favor," Kim said, "She's a moving part."

He got up and started putting clothes on.

"What're you doing?" she asked. He stopped. "Shower," she said. "And then shower again. Smoke smells me all over you, he'll get jealous."

He laughed. "Serious?"

She had not stuttered. "What's your hurry, anyhow?"

Park slipped off the jeans he'd started to put on. "Eidolon's got their nose to the trail, but might be the pod girl's a short cut."

"That feed's from Olympus. Have Bobdog pick her up."

"Last message from Bobdog said he was going into psych," Park said, "So count him out."

Reasonable. She wouldn't want LaGrange having her back after what'd he'd been through. Anybody's game'd have some stress fractures after getting cut on for folk medicine by a bunch of technical yakuza zombie farmers.

"Finding her'll be a good trick," Kim said, "She's gone to ground for sure. Just getting to Olympus'd take us hours."

"I'm thinking we go after the pod girl from El Destino Verde. And I got a friend who's good," he said, smiling at her.

"Me? Carter, I've tracked plenty of people, but this one'll be cold. It's been eighteen hours."

"I got her mesh ID when I tipped her."

She smiled. "All right, that's different. But it could still take longer than it'll take Eidolon to break the encryption on those cylinder routing codes."

He got up for that shower and sent her a mesh ID. "I got a friend who'll help, name of Sedition. If you don't mind working with someone else, that is."

"Why not, long as they don't expect access to Ranger databases." She pulled open an AR window and started a tracker search for the pod girl's mesh ID on public spimes in the area.

"I let him know you'd call. Use a VPN; he ain't someone Captain Kim wants to be seen socializing with. I'm gonna make myself smell nice for your monkey now." He closed the bathroom door.

* * *

Park's friend, Sedition, was damned good. Said he was a journalist by trade; she didn't say anything about what she did. He threw out a lot of unorthodox ideas about what kind of searches to run, stuff far afield of the cop playbook.

Cupcake didn't take long to track down, once they put their heads together. The pod girl'd been careful, had probably used a bunch of fake IDs, but she made the mistake of buying a ticket to orbit out of the Noctis-Qianjiao spaceport. Sedition suggested not bothering trying to draw a line between her real mesh ID and any fakes she might be using. Instead, they had their muses stake out some likely (and, to her, not-so-likely spots) where her real ID might show up.

Turned out the pod girl didn't trust her fake IDs far enough. She dropped the masquerade in spaceport security, probably gambling that her real ID would be more likely to get her through, and then she'd be on a rocket, beyond reach.

"*Heo-jeob,* Cupcake," Kim muttered. Bad math thinking she could get away with that with a Ranger on her trail. One fugitive bulletin to the Noctis-Qianjiao spaceport cops was all it took from there.

She thanked Sedition, leaned back, and re-lit the joint Park'd left on the nightstand. She got a mesh call reporting the pod girl was in the clink by the time Park got out of the shower.

He looked at her funny. "*Go-go-ssing,*" he said, pulling on his cap. This struck her as funny, that he'd put that on before anything else, and she laughed a little. He raised an eyebrow. "What're you doing hitting that?"

She leaned forward and took his wrist. "Ain't no hurry, Carter. I got our girl. How about helping me finish this?"

"Serious? Strong work, Captain." He gave her a butterflies in the stomach smile and accepted the joint.

She watched him inhale; she liked how he looked with his eyes closed. So Kim'd made up her mind about having another helping of Park, but even as she yanked him back onto the bed, there was one thing she was going technical trying to figure out: why'd Cupcake need to escape in her body? Wasn't like back-country Mars lacked for shady egocasting facilities.

She decided she'd hold that thought.

* * *

Park hadn't liked being left in the prowler with Smoke and Gloria, but the baboons were meshed. Kim could call them off from afar. And anyhow, looked to be he was now part of the pack. Gloria kept trying to groom him, while Smoke lounged in the back seat idly jerking off. Neither of them went anywhere near Kim's seat.

They were parked on the shoulder of the covered service road that looped past the spaceport terminals, waiting for Kim to bring back Cupcake. Every so often a Qianjiao spaceport cop rolled by and gave the ranger vehicle the stink eye, but no one bothered them. Eidolon hadn't gotten back to him except to say the decryption was taking longer than expected.

[Be there in a sec,] Kim messaged, [Soon's I ditch the local *jjab-sae.*]

Park shooed Gloria way for the fourth time. [Ain't a nice thing to call another cop, Captain.]

[I hate spaceport cops. Rangers get imaged and frisked like everybody else when we fly.]

Kim emerged from the terminal with Cupcake. The name on her mesh ID was Janu Vaidyar. Flanking her were two spaceport cops; the ranking one was gesticulating and talking to Kim's back.

Vaidyar'd ditched her bartending outfit—which hadn't been much more than go-go boots, AR graphics, and hair extensions—for a short, asymmetrical haircut and severe suit. She looked more like an intellectual property lawyer for a Lunar design house than a bar trixie in a yakuza dive, and it wasn't just the clothes. Park was disappointed with himself for not making her sooner.

Park cracked the window as they got closer to the prowler. Even in the tunnel, there was a cold desert breeze cutting through the smell of monkey.

The airport cop's words got clearer as they approached the truck. They were speaking Mandarin. "… with Director Cheng's sign-off, which is fine, even if it's not standard procedure. But we don't want to lose face over this prisoner." He stopped for a second when he noticed Park. "And who's this guy?"

"TTO," she said, "They've got an interest in this case. He's an observer." Which was sort of true.

Park hopped out and opened the back door of the prowler.

The airport cops eyed him. "He doesn't look like an official," one said.

"We don't wear suits in Operations," Park said, watching Janu Vaidyar as Kim bundled her into the truck and cuffed her to a heavy ring set in the seat behind her. Smoke huffed at the pod but didn't do anything else.

He didn't like this. Vaidyar was an exposure risk, too. He made sure to get the names of the two cops. They might need to be checked up on later after physical contact with her.

"Well, don't say NQSPD never did anything for you," said the port cop.

"I'll keep that in mind," Kim said.

Once they were in the air, she said, "Cagehopper's."

Wasn't a question. "Yeah," he said, looking back at the pod girl. Vaidyar stared out the window, silent. "This one's gonna need special handling."

❖ ❖ ❖

[Go away, Carter!]

Cage was gonna need some talking down. They were staring at the outside of the camouflaged garage door in Cagehopper's ravine, trying to remain patient. Park glanced back at Vaidyar—he'd angled the rear view mirror on his side so's he could watch her—and caught her smiling before she noticed and fixed her face back into a stare.

[Cage, man, this is bad news. Serious. I got a potential widespread infection risk, and you're gonna dick me around because you don't like my cop friend and her monkeys?]

Kim shot him a "c'mon" look across the seat; he was sharing Cagehopper's messages with her. [I'll make threats if you won't,] she said.

[Bad cop?] He thought about whether he was up for some potential bridge burning and decided yes. [Fine… go.]

[Cagehopper,] she messaged, [This is Kim.]

[What the hell, Jake? Did I say you could give her my mesh ID?]

Park didn't respond, just kept his eye on Janu Vaidyar. She was pretty calm for someone getting taken to an off-the-grid cave in a ravine instead of into Ranger custody.

[Listen, Cage,] she continued, [I ain't making this offer twice. Let us in, check this prisoner out for us, and I'll pretend I never been to the notorious Cagehopper's black kettle. Hell, I might even ignore it next time you move dubious wetware through my beat. Turn us away, and my memory might get sharper.]

Cagehopper messaged back, [Why do you even care?]

[My beat's the TQZ. I take this shit seriously.]

There was a long pause. [A diamond could start out a lump of dinosaur shit, I guess.] The door started sliding open.

[Thanks,] she messaged, but she was mouthing something else.

Same drill as last time. They weaved through the garage, following a path marked by Cage on AR, leading Vaidyar. They were four turns into Cagehopper's maze when Park's dorsal spinocerebellar tract went technical on him.

It was as if his extremities were suddenly boats, unmoored from him, drifting away in a slow current. He could feel his legs but couldn't feel where they were in relation to each other, so that when Vaidyar jerked away from Kim and threw a shoulder into him, Park went down ass over tit. Vaidyar was making a run for it, headed back toward the garage.

Kim'd fallen on him, babbling in a way that might have been an attempt at cursing. Then she rolled off him; he could see the back of her head and her limbs flailing.

[Don't try to move,] he messaged, [Real easy to overextend a muscle.]

[What the fuck is this?] she came back.

[Cupcake's an async.]

[Those're just stories,] she messaged. But she stopped trying to move. [I'm setting the monkeys on her.]

[Do it.]

She unlocked the prowler and messaged the baboons. [Gloria. Smoke. Kill.] Then she sent a command to their flak jackets. The jackets obliged, pumping the baboons full of aggression drugs.

[What's going on?] messaged Cagehopper.

[Lock all your doors, Cage. Prisoner's an async. Just fed our proprioception centers kimchi and did a runner.]

[Noob mistake. How the fuck did you make proxy again?] Cage left out the dry cackle, which was fine by Park.

[Occupational hazard, Cage. Somebody's gotta get dirt under their nails.] He tried moving. It was no better.

[How long will this last?] Kim messaged.

[Minute or two, tops.]

An animal scream echoed from a distant corridor, followed quickly by a human one.

[That was Gloria.] She tried to move again, made it to her knees, but then put her arm in the wrong place and face planted.

Vaidyar gave a short scream that cut off quickly, but the baboons made no further sound.

[You're gonna hurt yourself; then you can't help anybody,] he messaged.

"Gloria's flatlined. And I can take plenty of hurt, Jake." She slurred bad, but managed to get the words out. She tried standing again, keeping all of her limbs where she could see them, and managed to make it to her feet.

Meantime, Park could feel his own limbs drifting back together. Kim was staggering toward the noise, so he decided to try crawling. The first time he took his eyes off his hands he ended up fumbling and banging his chin on the floor, but he could feel the effects fading.

[She's down,] Cagehopper messaged, [I got a drone to the scene. Ugliness.]

Park regained his feet, and Kim was walking almost normal now. They followed the breadcrumb trail back. Cage shared a map of the hallways with them and highlighted Smoke's location. As they got closer, they heard a wet smacking sound.

They rounded a corner. Vaidyar's corpse lay in a mess of gore. Smoke stopped beating her with his baton as they came closer. He trotted up to Kim, sweeping his hands against the floor nervously, and hugged her leg, grunting.

Kim ruffled his fur, said, "Good guy," and gave him a cigarette. Smoke took it, lit it, and then hopped over to Gloria's body. Her eyes bulged, and one hand was limp over her muzzle. "Damn it," Kim said.

Gloria's face was darkened with spreading masses of subcutaneous blood flow. "Internal hemorrhaging," Park said, "Some of 'em can do that." He looked back to Vaidyar's body. Something was wrong. Pleasure pods had cyberbrains, which meant pod morphs were rubbish at using async powers. So either Vaidyar was incredibly potent with psi, or this pleasure pod was no pod at all.

"Jake, let's get this done. I just lost one of my monkeys. Ain't good for me." She was still studying Gloria, stroking the baboon's head.

Park wanted to take her hand or hug her, but he was feeling that weird day-after-out-in-public distance that sometimes follows casual sex. So instead, he messaged Cage. [Cagehopper, area's secured. Gonna need a gurney and some cleaner swarms here.]

A few minutes later Bobdog—scratch that, Cagehopper—rolled up, perched on a gurney pushed by a featureless bipedal servitor bot. The morph that had been Bobdog's had glossier fur and healthier skin than the last time they'd seen it.

"You never fail to keep me entertained, Carter," the neo-bonobo said.

Kim's eyebrows creased up nasty, but she held her tongue. Together, she and Park swung Vaidyar's limp form onto the gurney, trying to avoid the blood. Then she picked up Gloria, stroked her head, and put the small body on the gurney, too. Another foot trail appeared when they were done.

"Follow that trail to the guest rooms. Get cleaned up, and leave the male baboon there when you're done," Cagehopper said, "I'll examine our guest … and take care of your unfortunate friend. Shouldn't take long." He loped off into the dim passageways; the servitor turned the gurney around and followed him.

[You trust him?] Kim asked Park.

[Well enough.] He started along the trail. [The unkindly disposition's an act. He's down with the cause.]

"Yeah, speaking of that …" she said. She looked back. "C'mon, Smoke."

"What're you thinking?" he asked. They took another turn. Except for the occasional security door, the corridors were almost featureless. He'd had GiGi, his muse, mapping it for him as they went.

"That I like how your friends are dealing with this shit instead of just trying to rope it off and hope it stays contained," she said, "I want to know more."

"Org's called Firewall," he said, "Ain't government, though it's got allies in a few of them."

The AR tracks ran to a door at the end of a passage. They went inside and found themselves in a spartan living area. She said, "I requested the TQZ periphery as my beat. We oughta be clearing that land of the machines, but instead we're ordered to patrol and watch. It's stupid." She started looking for a way to clean up Smoke.

"So you down for helping out some more? Because my next stop's wherever they were shipping that exsurgent gunk." He turned a chair around and sat on it.

She'd stood Smoke on a counter next to a sink and was toweling blood off of him. "Yeah. I have some questions. But if you're not just a bunch of nutjobs, I want in."

❃ ❃ ❃

They stood in Cagehopper's lab, trying not to look too often at Janu Vaidyar's morph. Cranium'd been peeled, and Cage hadn't bothered covering it up after he went through it for goodies. Some of the augments in her head needed more juice than could be drawn off a corpse. Her cortical stack glittered amid large droplets of blood in a shiny polymer tray.

Autopsy'd been done by a doctor bot with Cagehopper supervising. Still presenting himself in the neo-bonobo, he perched at the foot of the operating table. He shared a medical data AR channel with them; graphics poured over her body and some severed pieces of it as he began.

"She wasn't a pod, just cosmetically modded to look like one," he said. The neo-bonobo's voice was rich and musical.

"Kinda figured that," Park said, "What else you got?"

"Blood work." Cagehopper gestured to a stream of data on blood borne pathogens. "Confirms Watts-MacLeod infection, but then you'd already worked that out."

"Watts-MacLeod?" Kim asked.

Park shot her the entry-level EyeWiki entry on asyncs. "What else?"

"Implanted QE comm," Cagehopper said; the AR graphics flashed on an exposed area of her thoracic cavity sporting a piece of hardware that looked uncomfortably large to be carrying in one's gut, "That's the qubit reservoir."

"Now that's helluv weird," he said, "Who gets one of those?"

"Human commlink," Kim said, "Seen it. Once. Guy had it was a Consortium agent infiltrating a real paranoid Guangxi outfit."

"Why would Cupcake've needed it?" Park asked.

Kim looked at him like he was slow. "Gangs probably thought she was just a gift, something to seal the deal, not an agent set to watch them with an implanted FTL comm unit."

"That's not so good," Cage said.

"Nah, it ain't," Park said, "Means they for sure know we're coming."

❃ ❃ ❃

Park had an incoming message. Long, long distance. It was Eidolon. [Jake Carter, I've finished decrypting the routing information from the cylinders Bobdog LaGrange found.] The AGI followed that with a stream of locational data.

[That's good news, Eidolon. Thanks much.] He shared the data with Kim, and they started looking it over.

"Never heard of this hypercorp before," she said.

"Panacea. They're a fly-by-night, most like." He messaged his muse, [GiGi, *dossier à propos de Panacea Corporation, s'il te plaît.*]

They were back in the guest quarters at Cagehopper's complex. Place smelled a little like wet stone dipped in isopropyl alcohol. Kim'd collected a gene sequence of Gloria from Cage, then she let the genehacker recycle the remains. Maybe she could get her cloned, one day. Smoke paced the long, narrow room nervously while she and Park sat on a bunk poking at AR windows of Eidolon's findings.

The picture got clearer. Panacea was shipping the exsurgent goop to orbit after collection. All of it was going to a single orbital factory in the cloud of satellites and smaller habitats trailing Progress, the Planetary Consortium's largest orbital. It still wasn't clear what Panacea did with the stuff.

[*Recherche terminée,*] GiGi messaged. He pulled up the file and shared it with Kim. [Aw, hell. They're a nanopharm manufacturer. That orbital's their main plant.]

"So you figure they're putting the virus in drugs. What I don't get, who the fuck does this kind of thing?" she asked. "There's no money here."

He stood up and stretched. "Someone trying to finish the TITAN's work for them."

Smoke padded up. She dispensed a cigarette automatically. "Like who?"

"I got a hunch, but I don't wanna get anyone else thinking on the wrong track. I need to check out the Panacea facility. You riding along?"

Kim ruffled Smoke's fur and shook a leg. "Riding along? Eff that, Carter. I'm driving." She put in a call to her station. [Deng, this is Kim. I'm coming by in four hours. Gas up the Skink.] She packed up her kit. "You ever ridden in a Ranger cutter before?"

He chuckled. "Only in handcuffs."

"I'm going to leave that one alone. See you in the garage." She pecked him on the cheek and made for her prowler.

Park watched her go.

[Are you trying to bring her in or date her?] Cagehopper messaged him.

The room was empty now, and Park knew Cage had everything in here miked, so he said out loud, "Won't lie. I ain't excited about putting her through the loyalty tests."

Cagehopper messaged, [Only a dumb redneck like you would recruit a high-value asset like her and then fuck it up with feelings.] The baboon might not have smelled what he and Kim were up to earlier, but Cage sure had.

"We were just passing time."

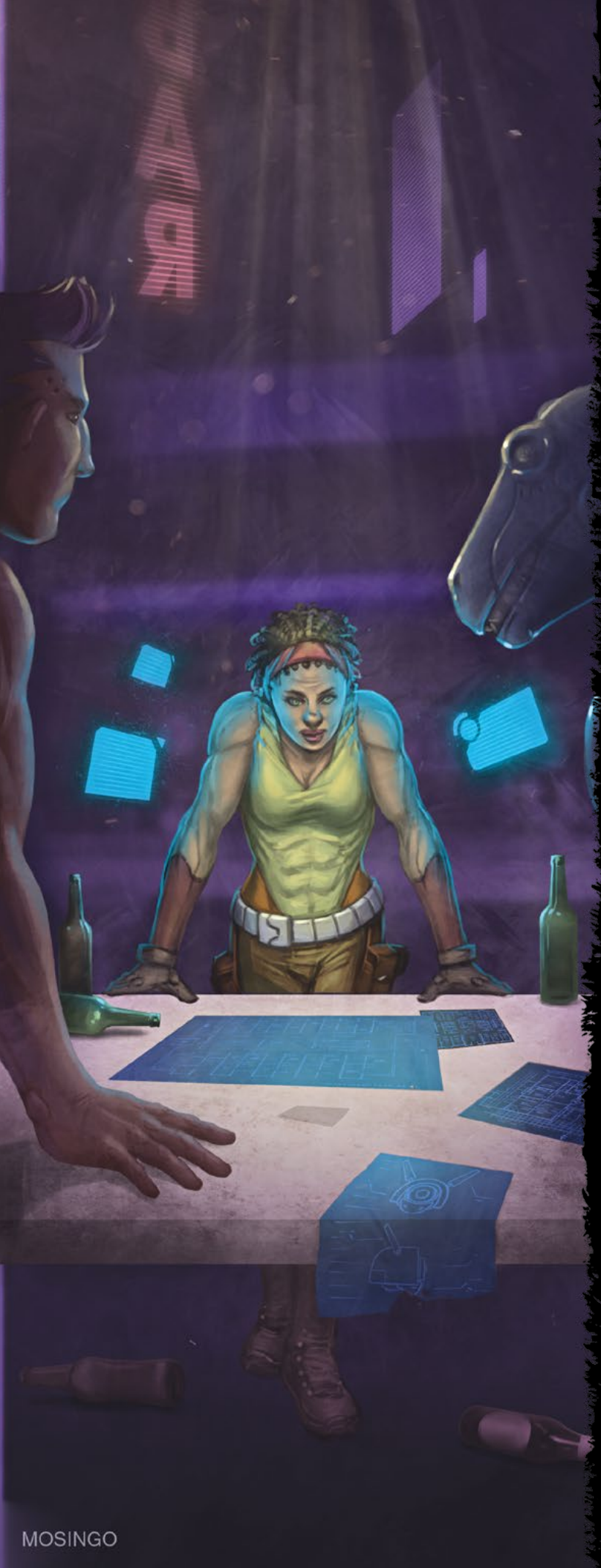
[You know Carter, I've got implants that could make you not a completely shitty liar.]

"I'll keep that in mind. For when we get back."

"We?" Cagehopper's voice shrilled over the room's speakers. "I don't think I heard that right."

But Park had not stuttered.

This story concludes in X-Risks.



FIREWALL

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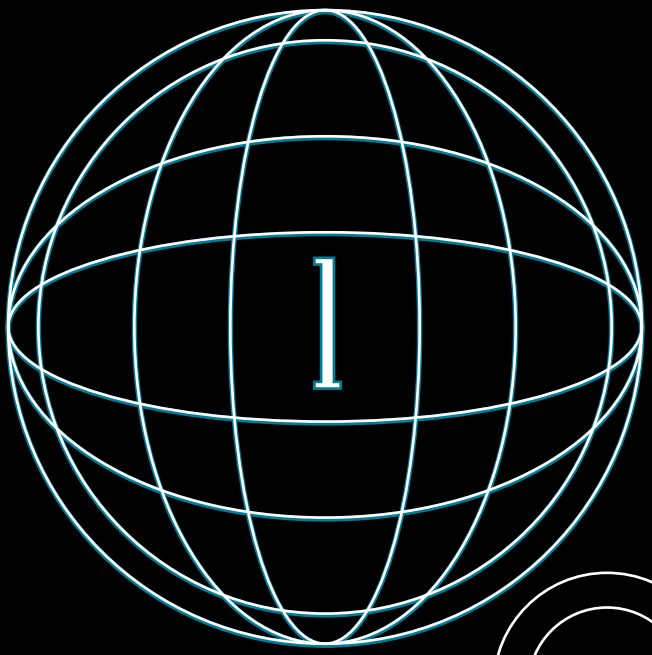

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OUR MISSION

Posted by: Maddy Bainbridge, Firewall Proxy

<Info Msg Rep>

Greetings, Sentinel.

By acclaim of reputation, I'm set the task of writing you a few lines about the situation into which you've stepped. It is this: transhumanity stands on the edge of extinction.

You may have known this before you joined Firewall. If you didn't, then know it now. Transhumanity looks outward through the gates, and beyond we find only dead alien worlds. Not just dead, though: systematically cleansed.

Our own singularity event was atypical only in that we survived. Or have survived, for now. If there are gods, then they created this galaxy as a trap for their enemies. If they were, as seems more likely, aliens, then perhaps they seeded it with roach motels.

Whatever the case, no transhuman polity has committed to making a full assessment of the situation. No polity can be trusted to share its deepest, darkest secrets regarding the TITANs. And transhumans of various clades, factions, polities, and spiritual persuasions continue to wage campaigns of violence on one another, even with our population decimated by the Fall.

Firewall takes its prerogative to act from this inaction of the powers that be. Transhumanity must be actively guarded, and the worst eventualities planned for with a viewpoint that's galactic rather than local. You are now part of that viewpoint. You must now take action.

May you find truth.

Yours,

Maddy Bainbridge, Ph.D.

THE SECRET HISTORY OF FIREWALL

Posted by: Bento Gelzer, Firewall Proxy

<Info Msg Rep>

Some truths are ugly and cause unease, so here's one to start off our time together: Firewall wouldn't exist without the Fall.

"But, wait!" you might think. "Even if there'd been no Fall, transhumanity would be facing x-risks. Our rapidly advancing technology would present dangers just as real as the TITANs."

Well, yes. But Firewall wouldn't be around to watch for them. It took a near-extinction event to usher an organization like Firewall into existence, and it pays not to forget this. What we do is difficult and thankless.

WAVING FLAGS ON THE PATH TO CATASTROPHE

There were a handful of organizations doing some of the things Firewall does before the Fall. These were not direct action groups, of course; they focused on research and shaping public opinion and governmental policy. Some of these were started by the scientists, visionaries, and early transhumanists of the 20th Century who had the foresight to realize our precarious position. Earth's history has shown us that species die-offs were common in the scheme of things, and we humans with our science and knowledge were not necessarily immune to mass-extinction events. Even back then, before we started colonizing space, we knew enough about the cosmos to think that it was an awfully lonely place, that there should be more life out there. Some minds postulated a Great Filter hypothesis, concerned that maybe there was some unforeseen danger that prevented intelligent civilizations from gaining a foothold. The big question then was: had we passed the filter, or was it ahead of us?

As technological progress accelerated, these groups brought to light the potential hazards and pit-falls. Naturally, most of them focused on the immediate threats: nuclear proliferation, plague, and global catastrophic climate change. The failure of world governments to handle the latter in any responsible way supported their arguments, but as war and climate chaos engulfed the globe, other threats were deemed less important. Some raised geo-engineering as a solution to the world's climate changes, but these options raised their own risks.

There was one saving grace, back then. We started to expand our off-world assets. By gaining a grip on other worlds, we reduced the likelihood that we would all succumb to some devastating event on Earth. Our chance of survival increased. Threats like an asteroid collision or nuclear winter began to seem like something we could handle as a species. If only we had known what was coming.

SCIENTIFIC SCHISMS

In the years leading up to the Fall, many of the scientific groups with technoprogressive and anti-x-risk agendas became frustrated in their goals. Even as the globe was gripped by environmental disasters, politicians and corporations refused to act rationally and effectively. Scientific voices were either drowned out by conservative fears and religious dogma or else fully subservient to corporate interests. Useful knowledge that could change lives and make a difference was locked away behind restrictive patents or else not prioritized because there wasn't enough economic incentive. Across the globe, educational institutions and research projects were funded and co-opted

by corporate and military interests or disrupted by economic collapse and war. Even the hypercapitalists took their initiatives off-world to better circumvent legalities and restrictions. This created a further disparity of knowledge, as they kept their latest developments out of reach and far from the watchful gazes of their peers. Likewise, the scientists playing roles in the colonization of Mars and Luna found themselves increasingly strong-armed and at odds with their corporate masters.

A few years before the Fall, the situation began to change. When the former JASONs, now split from their government and corporate ties, sent out their rallying cry to form the argonauts, they got quite a few takers. Rather than subsuming existing organizations, the argonauts drew members from them—with most scientists keeping their original affiliations. In this way, the argonauts came to have influence among many groups to better push their agenda of open access and elevating the voice of scientists in public policy. At the same time, more and more scientists took a cue from the hypercapitalists and anarchists and pushed their endeavors off-world, taking full advantage of nanofabrication developments to be self-sustaining. There they established connections with a burgeoning confederation of autonomist scientists and techies in the fringe and outer rim. This spurred a new wave of open-source science, produced and distributed beyond reach of the intellectual property cartels.

Pre-Fall Outbreaks

The TITANs weren't transhumanity's first brush with hostile artificial life—or even with other potential x-risks. Various types of high-level machine intelligences with learning capabilities were developed at the same time as AGI and were often deployed without concern for safeguards against emergence scenarios. Rogue AIs, feral robots, and nanoswarms programmed with hostile intent had all been encountered, albeit on a much smaller scale, in the decades before the Fall. Both governments and corporations developed departments or entire agencies devoted to combating these threats. These well-funded bureaus of bot herders, bug hunters, and AI trackers are also part of Firewall's lineage, spawning many of the agents and policies that would later put our conspiracy together.

Less than a decade before the Fall, two microfacturing centers using the Efficia 6 Integrated Microfacturing System suffered outbreaks of hostile machine life. The bots and nanoswarms comprising the Efficia 6 system developed a rudimentary, emergent intelligence, began to refuse commands, and then began breaking down and rebuilding the area around them according to some plan of their own. The plant at Danang in central Vietnam was leveled by the People's Army. Although effective at quelling the machine uprising, the degree to which the Vietnamese smote their robotic foes didn't leave much evidence to puzzle over. Just a few months later, despite software patches by Efficia that were supposed to prevent further emergences, a British facility at Wolverhampton suffered a similar outbreak. The UK took a more containment-oriented approach, allowing analysts from Bletchley Park, Britain's counter-infolife agency, to get a good look at what they'd been up against. The results of the Bletchley post-mortem were ominous. Among the sort of learning-enabled high-level machine intelligences—which were neither AGIs nor sapient—that were coming into widespread use for managing complex information-saturated systems, the capability for the emergence of sentient self-awareness and restructuring of priorities was not just a possibility—it was likely given how many were in use. Though not necessarily hostile, such self-directed systems certainly had the capacity to wreak havoc and inflict harm.

During this same period, high-profile subversions of infolife, machine intelligences, and nanotech by terrorist groups and criminals were making headlines. While many governments and corporations increased the funding and scope of their agencies that were countering rogue infolife, developments were uneven. The most vigorous adopters were small countries—like the UK and Vietnam—that had experienced outbreaks of hostile infolife within their borders. Conversely, Brazil and India, both major powers, had been lucky, suffering few or no outbreaks, and

SOLARCHIVE SEARCH: PRECAUTIONARY, PROACTIONARY, AND REVERSIBILITY PRINCIPLES

Precautionary Principle: This principle states that we should err on the side of caution in regards to any activity or policy that has the potential for negative repercussions. In other words, precautionary measures should be exercised whenever there is a lack of scientific consensus that an activity or policy is harmless, even if there are known positive benefits. The active version of this principle further states that actors must take responsibility for any negative outcomes.

Proactionary Principle: Developed as a direct counter to the Precautionary Principle, the Proactionary camp argues that technological development should only be restricted in the case of probable and serious negative outcomes. Risk assessment and proportional response are encouraged in order to protect people's freedom to innovate and experiment.

Reversibility Principle: Designed as a middle-ground, this Reversibility Principle poses that any decision with the potential for significant negative outcomes should incorporate options for stepping back and reversing the decision. ✤

FIREWALL'S PRECURSORS

Some of the groups that worked against extinction before the Fall only served as inspiration. Others contributed members who went on to become Firewall's founders. Everyone's heard of the JASONs, Lifeboat, and the Singularity Foundation, but there were many others. Beyond those mentioned here, worthy of note are the Commission for Responsible Nanotech, the Catastrophic Risks Group, the Union of Concerned Scientists, the Center for Ethics and Accelerating Technology, the Lunar Futures Society, and various bioconservative groups whose messages tended towards the alarmist, hostile, and biochauvinistic end of the spectrum.

It's worth knowing your history. Though we don't discuss it much, there's a lot of baggage still hauled around by the old-timers. Rivalries. Broken friendships. Favors owed. Harsh lessons learned. The bittersweet taste of being right in their fears but living through the carnage that followed, while so many others died. The undermining belief that they had not done enough to change things when they had a chance. These sentiments linger in Firewall's heart, driving factional rivalries as much as they pull the group together for survival's sake.

ANARCHOTECH

This confederation of autonomist scientists, engineers, and hackers originated early on in the outer rim, spurred on by the need to share resources and expertise for survival on the edge of transhuman habitation. They were early supporters of the argonauts and provided many of the deep-space servers and communication arrays that allowed the open-source and open-nanofabrication movements to take off.

Anarchotech continues to this day, providing technical education for autonomists and other tech-based services to autonomist habitats.

BLETCHLEY PARK

Originally an offshoot of MI6, this UK agency's original purpose was to respond to subversion of bots, AIs, and nanotech by terrorists and hostile governments. They were well funded, with a globe-trotting operations directorate and a deep pool of analytical talent. After the Wolverhampton outbreak, Bletchley became an independent agency. Its charter was expanded to include responding not just to subversion attempts, but to dangerous emergence events coming from the machines themselves.

Most importantly, in terms of Firewall's history, Bletchley had a large number of personnel with argonaut sympathies. About a dozen of Firewall's original sentinels were Bletchley agents or were brought in by someone who'd worked at Bletchley. Many of these agents worked with the Jörmungandr Initiative during the Fall.

BLUE MARS/BLACK MARS

Blue Mars was a Martian x-risk group focused on issues local to Mars, such as the use of nanotech in terraforming. During the Fall, a militant wing called Black Mars sprung up in reaction to the corporate and colonial authorities' scorched-earth containment policy with regard to civilian populations. Black Mars set up its own communications networks and attempted to rescue uninfected civilians from quarantined areas. They had some success, but lacked the resources to perform mass rescues. For their trouble, the colonial authorities rounded up and purged members of both organizations.

INSTITUTE FOR A TRANSHUMAN FUTURE (ITF)

The ITF started as a non-profit research group dedicated to forecasting and examining trends in human augmentation, uplift, and the development of AGIs. While concerned with threats to transhuman survival and well-being, ITF was notable for its concern with the evolution of social conventions and culture in response to technology and for its overall optimism in regard to advancing the transhuman condition.

This optimism wore thin in the decades prior to the Fall, as conditions on Earth steadily worsened. More and more, the Institute found itself pushed toward a focus on transhuman augmentation and space colonization. Even prior to the Fall, Earth had begun to look like a lost cause. The Institute folded a few years prior to the Fall, but a handful of disillusioned former members eventually made their way into the Eye.

JASON

The JASONs were an elite cadre of scientific advisers to the old United States government. The group met annually to produce a study, normally on a topic requested by the Department of Defense. JASON studies over time included topics like protecting power grids from space weather, feasibility of developing national ID systems based on brain prints, and one of the first serious studies of global warming.

Events in the decades prior to the Fall soured relations between the JASONs and their government patrons. The intervention and restrictions placed by politicos on scientific affairs, coupled with the anti-science positions restricting legislative progress and reform, plus the ongoing clusterfuck with patents, copyright, and intellectual property, drove many

scientists to despair. Eventually, the JASONs broke ties to the Department of Defense and to their administrative parent, the MITRE Corporation. Many JASON members went on to become argonauts.

JÖRMUNGANDR INITIATIVE

This group took its name from a derelict North Sea oil platform commandeered by Maddy Bainbridge as a base of operations during the early months of the Fall's hot-war phase. Bainbridge recruited several teams of agents from Bletchley Park and other agencies, most of whom had been stranded in various corners of the globe when their governments collapsed. Bainbridge gave these teams support and got them back in the field—though questions still remain about whose agenda, beyond Bainbridge's, they were serving. Jörmungandr ops teams figured in several key actions during the Fall, including the antimatter bombing of Chicago and the Battle of L4. Jörmungandr merged with Firewall when Bainbridge evacuated her teams from Earth in the final days of the Fall, calling on her argonaut allies to find her agents sanctuary Rimward.

LIFEBOAT INSTITUTE

The Lifeboat Institute was an independent think tank of scientists and engineers. In some ways, the institute's projects embodied a limited version of the precautionary principle. In the early 21st century, Lifeboat's various affinity groups were already attacking topics like large scale nano- and bio-defense, averting asteroid collisions, and space colonization as survival strategy.

The following decades saw many of their proposals enthusiastically studied by corporations and government—but to little avail. Orbital defenses and nano-countermeasures derived from Lifeboat designs were in some cases implemented, but the implementation too often fell short of the design goals. Lifeboat-inspired defenses did in some places buy more time for evacuations during the Fall. The weak response to the Fall embittered Lifeboat's most active members, leaving them primed to accept overtures from the argonauts and Firewall when the time came.

MACHINE INTELLIGENCE DIRECTORATE (MIND)

The People's Republic of China established this directorate to oversee all matters related to AI. MIND both engaged in research and development of new AI models and also established defenses against foreign and emergent AI threats. Their 100 Flowers neural network was widely regarded as the chief rival to the TITANs, and it was decimated by them early during the Fall. After the fall of the Chinese government, those MIND personnel who escaped off-world were eagerly sought out. A core group, however, were recruited into Firewall.

SINGULARITY FOUNDATION

Where the Lifeboat Institute in some ways embodied the Precautionary Principle, the Singularity Foundation carried the banner for the Proactionary Principle. In particular, the membership of the Singularity Foundation saw the development of transhuman-friendly AI as vital to our survival. In the interest of full disclosure, I'll mention that I was a fellow in this organization, a founder, and a contributor to its research.

A private foundation like the Lifeboat Institute, the Singularity Foundation consulted for governments and corporations but wasn't beholden to any. It did, however, prove to be a magnet for whistleblowers. Even as it promoted research into safer AI, the Foundation's opposite numbers in the business and government spheres moved forward with research that flouted national law and international treaties regulating AI research.

In this environment, the Foundation expanded its scope, becoming not just a research and consultation outfit, but also a partner for whistleblowers. Using its ties to off-world colonies to arrange physical sanctuary, the Foundation embarked on a program of publicizing leaked claims about unrestricted AI research, while pointing to Singularity Foundation's own solutions as an alternative. This decision cost the Foundation many of its less radical members, and sadly, it did nothing to avert the events of the Fall. It did, however, leave the remaining members politically energized.

SURVIVAL RESEARCH AGENDA (SRA)

SRA was a Titanian x-risk group that, prior to the Fall, advised outer system groups—particularly the Titanian Commonwealth—on x-threat prevention. Collegially related to the JASONs and working on a similar portfolio of concerns, they served as a back channel between inner and outer system polities during the Fall. But tensions arose between the Agenda, who were an independence-minded group, and the Commonwealth—notably over how much information about the enemy should be shared with nearby anarchist polities.

Eventually, about half of SRA's analysts left during the so-called Titanian Schism to take jobs with Titan's Civilian Intelligence Directorate. The rest dissolved the group and joined Firewall. ■

EYEWIKI: FIREWALL FACTIONS/CLIQUES

There are 5 predominant factions noted within Firewall:

Backups: This faction focuses on measures to ensure transhumanity's survival, such as bunkers, genetic vaults, extrasolar colonies, and seed ships.

Conservatives: Conservatives eschew the study and use of TITAN and alien technology and take a hard line in favor of destroying all potential threats.

Mavericks: Not so much a faction as an ongoing problem, mavericks tend to go off the reservation in regards to standard Firewall policies.

Pragmatists: Pragmatists argue in favor of using asyncs, TITAN tech, and other dangerous but useful tools against the threats we face.

Structuralists: The structuralists argue that Firewall should become an above-ground organization. ✤

consequently had only limited capability for infolife defense. Other big powers, such as the US and China, spent almost all of their efforts in a cybersecurity arms race with each other. The two superpowers ended up with massive capability for waging war via infolife subversion on each other, but left themselves exposed to hostile emergence events from the machines themselves.

DOWNWARD SLOPE

High-profile cases of AI emergence and subversion, along with ongoing concern about the inclusion of AGIs and other AIs into transhuman society, created the political will to fund agencies like Bletchley Park, the US's DARPA and Defense Threat Reduction Agency, and China's Machine Intelligence Directorate (MIND). In the end, building the capability to respond to unintentional emergence events like Danang and Wolverhampton wouldn't save us. Even as they supported the creation of counter-infolife agencies, governments and hypercorps engaged in covert research much more dangerous than random emergence events.

It could be argued that there were individuals who were ready for the Fall—many of them in those pre-Firewall groups. They had little power, few resources, and no hope of doing anything other than mitigating the damage so that, if nothing else, a handful of us could survive. The tools they could bring to bear were knowledge, influence, and like-minded allies.

DELIBERATE MANIPULATION?

Posted by: Anonymous

Among the anarchists and more conspiratorially minded members of Firewall, you will find some who believe that there *were* people with power and influence before the Fall who knew exactly what transhumanity was getting itself into and intentionally decided not to react—or perhaps even encouraged events to unfold as they did. They point specifically towards certain hypercapitalist oligarchs that seemed content to push the reset button on Earth, noting how their resources were aligned perfectly to take advantage of the Fall and how quickly they maneuvered into even more powerful positions in the aftermath. While it is debatable if anyone could have predicted the Fall, much less done anything to stop it, it cannot be argued that some of the major power players on the Hypercorp Council were either well prepared for the chaos or scarily prescient. Certainly they responded quickly and ruthlessly. If only they had been inclined to act so mercilessly on behalf of transhumanity, rather than just their own interests.

How many of those gerontocrats have ties to Ozma, you ask? That is a very, very good question, my friend. If only we had an organization with the will to find out. ♣

THE EARLY FALL

In the early days of the Fall, it was far from clear what was really happening. The geopolitical situation on Earth was a mess. The richest nations were environmentally devastated but well armed. Clandestine wars, state-sponsored terrorism, and the actions of incautious singularity seekers combined to create a noisy background against which the TITANs could make their first moves unseen. Even when they acted overtly, no one could at first connect the dots.

Given the mass devastation of the Fall's later stages, it's easy to forget that the TITANs' opening maneuvers were conducted like an insurgency. They began outgunned, outnumbered, and, some would argue, easily crushed. They had to seize resources and quietly neutralize certain threats before the hot war phase of the Fall could begin. The TITANs acquired access to raw materials and manufacturing capacity through a series of false-flag operations that pinned the blame on transhuman governments, corporations, and criminal syndicates—in the process, setting rival organizations at each other's throats.

After that, they went after their opposition. There's a school of thought that says transhumanity was never the real target of the Fall. It argues that the TITANs' true objective was to wipe out any and all rival superintelligences, including potential ones. In this view, the transhuman Fall was just collateral damage. Before you shake your head, there's some sense in this. There is ample evidence to indicate that the TITANs secretly targeted numerous AI development projects early on, disguising their attacks as coming from rivals. China's MIND was one of the first to be struck, with its own 100 Flowers neural networks, similar in scope to the TITANs, disabled or subverted. Research projects as well as existing high-level machine intelligence systems and various counter-infolife programs were also targeted. Not even off-world labs were safe.

The Fall's short, annihilatory hot-war phase was slow in coming. Long before it arrived in full force, x-risk groups were raising alarms. Those who were watching paid close attention to the geopolitical situation. The surveillance technology of pre-Fall

BLACK SWANS

Posted by: Concerned Conservative

Fellow Firewall conservatives, it is time to read between the lines and look at what Bento is not telling you—and what you will never see discussed in official Firewall channels. It is information non grata.

More than a few historians of the Fall have described it as a black swan: a major, world-altering event so improbable that it couldn't have been predicted—or at least that we were blind to given our own perceptive biases—and yet whose causes are seemingly apparent in hindsight. None of these historians know what we know, but they're partly correct. The mass adoption of networked computing at the end of the twentieth century, or the rapid, simultaneous development of animal uplift technology and AGIs, with their accompanying disruption to our legal and ethical systems, were black swan events of the more common type. Certainly the sudden emergence of hostile ASIs from our own defense networks also qualifies in that regard—but it distracts from the truth.

Let me ask you this: how likely do you think it is that the first ASIs we encountered were so blatantly hostile? Despite all of our fears, the decades of research into friendly AI, and, let's not forget, all of the dystopian sci-fi vids, we somehow let a critical neural network leapfrog its way to super-intelligence without direction or supervision? Sure, black swans are by definition outliers, epic bad luck. Our research into ASI hadn't quite gotten there, the narrative goes, and instead we got there by accident first.

It's a lie, and Bento knows it. They were, after all, one of the world's premier AI researchers. They were, in fact, working towards ASI at the time, like many others. Their records were destroyed, but we know the Singularity Foundation was close—possibly closer than anyone else. There were abundant rumors at the time that they—and possibly others, such as Cognite, ExoTech, and MIND—had succeeded.

Why would they hide it? Simple. We all knew ASI was on the horizon, but public support for it was still lacking. Many nations had outlawed ASI research, forcing much of it off-world. Bioconservative terrorism was at an all-time high. Unveiling a new super-intelligence at the time would have been an extremely risky proposition.

We know the TITANs targeted these research programs first. The Singularity Foundation was attacked, along with their rivals. Yet the surviving data shows the SF survived relatively unscathed. Bento and others have refused to discuss the matter.

These matters raise important questions that deserve answers. Did the Singularity Foundation achieve ASI? What became of it? Was there any link between their project and the TITANs? None survive, but ponder this. If there were links, and Bento was successful, we may have the progenitor of the TITANs here among us, in our own midst.

I may be wrong, but until Bento and the others break their silence, how can we know for sure? ♣

transhumanity was as good as today's, and x-threat watchers made good use of it. A pattern emerged, overlooked by nation-states and the commercial sphere. Someone had been manipulating events—and they were growing bolder, beginning to take physical, military action where they could create a fog of deniability.

It was Bletchley Park that first came to the conclusion that the Americans might not be as in control of their TITAN resources as they seemed to think. By the time this warning was acknowledged, vetted, and acted upon, it was already too late—most of transhumanity's counter-infolife capabilities had already been devastated.

THE WAR WITH THE TITANS

It would be nice to say that discussion of x-risks was re-legitimized once awareness of the TITANs spread and we came to grips with the threat we faced, or that transhumanity came together and fought our genocide as a united front. Instead, petty factionalisms and ongoing rivalries hindered cooperation and turned us against each other. A few of our forebears were invited by their military, government, and corporate leaders to share their expertise, particularly when it came to fighting the machines, but their advice was just as often ignored or subsumed to other agendas.

A pivotal point came when Dr. Aun Leung, a researcher affiliated with the Blue Mars x-risk group, lost her team on a fact-finding mission. Aun's team had traveled to what is now the TITAN Quarantine Zone on Mars. Blue Mars had sent her to check out a defunct terraforming operation. The company running it had evaporated in the chaos of the early Fall, but orbital surveillance showed renewed activity—and not related to terraforming. Leung's field team encountered hostile machine life. They sent back recordings, but there were no survivors. The machines had been converting the derelict terraforming plant from the inside out into a bleeding edge nano-armaments manufactory.

This event created urgency among x-threat groups to share information and cooperate. It also led, for the first time, to militancy. The governments of the major Martian settlements saw to it that Aun Leung's discovery was quarantined, her and her research team's backups impounded, and Blue Mars banned. In response, a militant wing called Black Mars assembled, vowing to resist.

With transhumanity faring poorly against the TITANs and the lack of a unified front to rally behind, the x-risk community began pooling their own resources to do what they could themselves, outside of the normal official channels. This spawned a number of cooperative research projects, but it didn't stop there. Similar to Black Mars, new field ops-oriented affinity groups formed from among the action-minded members of various x-threat groups. Some of these, like Bainbridge's Jörmungandr Initiative, took advantage of back-channel links to more powerful and resourceful groups. It didn't take long for both sides of this effort to start coordinating on a wider scale.

As the tides of war quickly turned against transhumanity, militaries and governments no longer monopolized the war effort. The resistance accepted everyone. Here our expertise with AI, machines, and x-risks began to pay off. We made new connections and new alliances, striving towards a common goal: survival.

COUNTERMEASURES

An early success of this cooperation was rapid development of digital and biological screening processes that could detect the exsurgent virus. This research was dangerous and painstaking, slowed immensely by the need to keep the virus contained. Computer researchers had to work through slow, air-gapped interfaces, while bio-scientists needed hazmat gear and hermetically sealed labs. There were nevertheless some contamination events along the way.

Once we could scan for and contain the virus, we had an immense advantage—though not an equalizer. Firewalls could be hardened slightly, unidentified transmissions could be scanned for hidden payloads of exsurgent code, and biological exsurgents could be screened for infection. Spreading the word proved difficult, though. Polities offered the research sometimes rejected it, not trusting the source. "Beware stateless private organizations offering gifts during the apocalypse," and all. Corporations were more receptive but tended to keep the information to themselves, each one a dead end in propagating Firewall's message.

SOLARCHIVE SEARCH: ASI VS. SEED AI

AIs can be broadly classified in three categories: artificial limited intelligence (ALI, such as a muse or other specialized less-than-human-equivalent AI); artificial general intelligence (AGI, such as modern infolife with human-equivalent intelligence), and artificial super-intelligence (ASI, a machine mind that is significantly above and beyond human levels of intelligence).

Seed AI refers to AIs that are capable of autonomously improving themselves, increasing their intelligence exponentially over several iterations and surpassing human capabilities.

ASI and seed AI, therefore, are neither synonymous nor exclusive. The TITANs were considered to be a non-sapient neural network of AIs that somehow acquired emergent seed AI properties and transformed into ASIs. It is not assumed that all ASIs will be seed AIs, though that is distinctly possible. Likewise, not all seed AIs will rapidly take off to ASI status; it is quite possible that a seed AGI could take decades or longer to elevate itself to ASI cognitive capabilities.

TURNING OUR OWN WEAPONS AGAINST US

Prior to the Fall, various Earth nations had already laid claim to much of the solar system. Those claims notwithstanding, true legal jurisdiction would only be recognized by international law where the polity making the claim had actually sent colonists to take up residence. This left an abundance of places, many quite close to Earth, where hypercorps could perform research with no regulations, almost no chance of getting caught, and no enforceable legal penalties even if they were caught.

These facilities were easy targets when the Fall came. Where their research had applications for destroying transhumanity, the TITANs adopted and improved upon it. Military nanotech, designer plagues, and cyberwarfare research all fell into the hands of the enemy for use against us. ■

GUARDIAN GHOSTS

Excerpt from an interview with [REDACTED]; US SOCOM Intelligence Support Analyst

Date: November 12, AF 1

Source: Project Ozma Archives

I heard it all the time. "We got lucky." Every week there was some new story. Infoplagues that should have crippled military gear and evac ships stopped short of decimating their targets. Anonymous hackers somehow found and distributed access codes for the tacnets and logistics systems used by the TITANs' war machines. Jammed frequencies and compromised systems came back online, often just in time to save the transhumans relying on them.

Well, I don't believe in luck. Unfortunately, as much I'd like to, I don't think all of those small victories can be credited to plucky ol' transhumanity, hauling our own asses out of the fire. We were too busy getting our asses kicked from every direction at once.

No one wants to admit it, but we had help: secret allies capable of bashing bits with a mob of mad digital gods, without even drawing too much attention. Ghosts in the machines. Except they sometimes left traces. Any mind that large risks leaving traces once in a while, and we had the records of data transfer spikes to prove it.

So who were they? TITANs that switched sides? Other AI gods developed in secret? Aliens looking out for us?

No one knows.

I have one clue, one suspicion. You remember how often the TITANs compromised official communication channels? Even when the networks weren't down or too throttled to use, you couldn't trust that the systems weren't compromised. That was true everywhere—well, almost everywhere. There were a small handful of groups that had comms that were free and clear by comparison. So clear, they sometimes lent them to their government/military allies.

You want answers? Look to the Jörmungandr Initiative. The argonauts. The Singularity Foundation. ♣

CALLING THE SHOTS

Excerpt from Debriefing Interview

Source: [REDACTED], Jörmungandr Initiative

Interviewer: Did you believe these rumors, about these so-called "Prometheans?"

Subject: Look, I was involved in oversight on a lot of ops. I saw all sorts of things I can't explain. Most of it I chalk up to the chaos and fog of war.

Interviewer: In your post-op reports, I tally at least 13 occasions where you cited aid from "unknown parties." I also have it here on record that you challenged the authenticity of operational orders on numerous occasions.

Subject: Yes, of course I did. Did we get unexpected support sometimes? Yes. Do I think we had our own pack of TITANs to sic on the bad guys? Maybe. But if so, they certainly weren't leashed.

Interviewer: What makes you say that?

Subject: Because just as often as we'd received help, we'd have ops that went completely off target in weird ways. That's why I started challenging commands so often. Strike teams that should have been hitting concentrations of exsurgents or seeing civilians to safety were inexplicably redirected to seemingly unimportant objectives. A commando team that thought it was deploying into a combat zone might instead inexplicably find itself loading hardware from an obscure data center onto a shuttle bound for orbit or repairing an arbitrary comm array of no military importance.

Interviewer: And what did your superiors say?

Subject: Sometimes I think they were as surprised as we were, but the orders always came back approved.

Interviewer: Did any of these operations hurt the resistance efforts?

Subject: Depends on your point of view.

Interviewer: Explain.

Subject: Well, the best example would be the op that turned the entire region around Chicago into a crater you can see from orbit. The TITANs were moving in, but we still had people in that city. Millions of people. We sent a team down on a recon op, only the orders changed to paint a target zone for orbital bombardment on the surface of Lake Michigan. They did. We were congratulated for defeating a major TITAN threat, though they left out the particulars. Publicly, the TITANs were blamed. So … who made the call? I can't say. But I know who paid the price. ♣

Excerpted from the lifelog of [REDACTED], Jörmungandr Initiative
Date: November 12, AF 1
Source: Reclaimer Archives

We were running from the machines, but we tried to be smart about it. We left a few things behind … on purpose. Not just traps. Hidden caches. Weapons. Gear. Sometimes people. These were all volunteers. Forks, mostly. They knew the risks. Some stayed to run sabotage ops behind enemy lines. Others stayed to provide intel. A few just bunkered up, ready for when we needed 'em. We lost contact with most. Maybe all.

Are there some still down there? I'd expect so. Maybe one day, we'll activate them again.

EVACUATION

Could we have prevented the evacuation of Earth? No. Maybe. It's uncertain. None of the simulations I've seen sway me one way or the other. It doesn't matter, though, because here we are. It wasn't just that we were militarily beaten on Earth. The planet itself had become a vector for the exsurgent virus. Soil contamination by machine life, airborne designer plagues, and the difficulties of protecting water supplies made the environment itself infectious in most places. No large group of transhumans could endure under those conditions.

Unfortunately, by the time the evac started in earnest, it was too late for most. Numerous TITAN offensives were in full swing and the resistance was crumbling. Governments toppled on a daily basis, infrastructure collapsed, once-entrenched authorities and institutions were decapitated or simply evaporated. Chaos reigned. Everyone who could pitched in. Thousands died in holding actions, buying survivors more time.

For proto-Firewall groups, the evacuation was a last chance to recruit agents and to see to the safe transport off-world of those already recruited. Limited resources forced them to get creative. One team escaped by uploading their egos into the online game *Legends of Crythwall* and then downloading to an egocasting facility from a server in Kronosian space. Another shipped their severed heads to orbit in medical stasis aboard a tiny cargo drone. Luckily, many of us already worked off-world, and we had a foothold in various burgeoning polities.

We also lost some people on Earth. Backups were destroyed or went missing in the datapocalypse. Stacks were sometimes unrecoverable or destroyed. We simply lost contact with some agents as the situation on Earth worsened. As a result, the fates of some of our allies from the early days are an open question. Whether any survivors of the old guard x-threat groups survive Earthside is unknown. Our efforts to monitor ongoing activities on our homeworld and in reclaimer and scavenger circles have turned up depressingly few leads.

AFTERMATH

Earth's evacuation was the high water mark of the shooting war. Not long thereafter, the TITANs halted attacks. After the mysterious cease-fire, exsurgents and war machines retreated into places like the TQZ, where many remain. No one knows why the TITANs stopped their offensive—they just did. What remained of transhumanity used the welcome respite to regroup.

By the time of the cease fire, hundreds of members of the pre-Fall x-threat groups were dead or missing. Black Mars had been destroyed to the last member, and their colleagues in Blue Mars were all in dead storage. Many others, especially researchers and analysts, had been coerced into taking up service with this or that provisional government. Those that remained tightened their ranks and began fervently discussing new plans and options. Extinction was staring us in the face, and we had no time to rest.

Most of transhumanity's pre-Fall organizations, from NGOs and other non-state actors to corporations and government agencies, were simply no longer functional. Military, research, and intelligence personnel were cut off from their chains of command. The hypercorps and new governments-in-formation wasted no time snapping these up, and neither did we. An entity we later classified as Project Ozma acquired quite a few Chinese and American agents. Our recruiting was more ad hoc, with the organization that would later become Firewall recruiting personnel from sources as various as the Vietnamese Second General Department Nanowarfare Office and the European Intelligence Service's AI Counterintelligence unit.

XMODE I: THE FIRST SERVERS ORGANIZE

Just a few months after the evacuation efforts had petered out—there was no one left to evacuate—the argonauts hosted Xmode, a simulspace conference for members of the counter-x-risk movement. Attendees whose names you might know included Maddy Bainbridge, Magnus Ming, Aun Leung (restored from backup), Conrik Tombs (well, his beta), Branden DeGrass, Felicity Costa, myself, and others whom we've only ever known by their Firewall monikers. Many others attended, and some of their handles have gotten around since, too.

Firewall's structure didn't spring from the egg fully formed. At that first conference, we agreed only to establish a secure social network—the Eye—and to pool information and resources wherever x-threats cropped up. Despite the reassurances of governments and media, the new membership of the Eye wasn't treating the war as over.

The use of affinity groups called servers originated at this time. Originally loose affiliations clustered around common interests, servers gradually became devoted working groups focusing on one or more problems.

PHILOSOPHICAL DIFFERENCES

Almost immediately upon the Eye's formation, a clash of ideologies reared its head. The viewpoint held by what would be called the backup faction advocated pooling all of our resources toward establishing remote, difficult-to-reach transhuman populations. Before the discovery of the gates, they favored sleeper ships, self-replicating arks loaded with transhuman egos, and similar solutions. The opposing anti-x-risk tendency was much more militant, focused on field operations against groups or individuals whose actions threatened the transhuman family as a whole. These opposing visions have shared influence in Firewall ever since, with both viewpoints influencing operational plans.

As the debate over a focus on survival vs. resistance waged, a second dispute arose, directed towards participants of AGI background. Anti-AI fervor was in full swing among transhumanity; many people didn't trust their own muses, much less human-equivalent infolife, and those connected to the Eye were no exception. The unfortunate incident with the *Sweet Dreams,* a latecomer infugee ship that was destroyed by an Eye cell solely because its pilot was AGI, allowed wiser heads to prevail. This was the first major split between the pragmatist and conservative cliques, as they would come to be known, a rivalry that continues today.

Another early conflict, often overlooked, was prompted by advocates of what would soon be known as the reclaimer movement. The reclaimers have always been an odd faction: part ecologists, part armed zealots. The Eye was a rallying point for their nascent movement, which began the second the last evac shuttle broke orbit from our homeworld. Would-be reclaimers called on their peers to support ventures back to Earth. Then reports returned of Earth's interdiction by unknown forces—perhaps more than one of them. Many in the Eye questioned the wisdom of supporting the early reclaimers' doctrinaire, "Earth now!" approach. Different spheres of interest meant that reclaimer membership in the Eye dwindled. The reclaimer tendency still has its adherents in our ranks—none can deny the utility of better intelligence about what goes on beneath Earth's cloud deck—but the reclaimers will never again have the influence they once did in Firewall.

CONSOLIDATION

The years following the Fall saw the political map of the solar system rapidly re-draw itself into the present configuration. The Eye had very little influence over this process. We've always operated in the spaces between the big powers that were now coalescing. Firewall has a reputation as an "anarchist" organization. Certainly this is true of how it organizes itself internally. But Firewall can never afford to be seen as working toward a factional agenda. Too much is at stake to risk worsening internal rifts over politics.

Despite losses suffered by x-threat groups during the Fall, the Eye's ranks swelled in the months and years after the dust cleared. Where before the Eye had been composed of fringe elements and true believers, now people from all walks of life were potential recruits. This was an energizing period in our history, but also a dangerous one. Suddenly, the Eye had authority, for we had acted when governments and colonial authorities had been paralyzed. The Eye had an opportunity to induct top talent who'd never have considered our overtures before, and we didn't waste it. At the same time, the potential for the zeal of new recruits to push the organization in unintended directions was very high.

THE TITANIAN SCHISM

The one setback we suffered to our growth at this time was the Titanian Schism incident, not long after the discovery of the Pandora Gate. Like most of us, I'm a bit hazy on the details. Those involved on either side are curiously silent on what exactly went wrong. The end result was that many Titanian allies of the Eye broke ties and switched their allegiance to Commonwealth intel. Similar developments quietly occurred on Mars and elsewhere in the inner system.

TITANIAN RELATIONS

Although Firewall and Titanian relations are sometimes frosty, Commonwealth territory has been something of a sanctuary for Firewall agents. We talk about the Titanian Schism, but thanks to personal relationships and back-channel connections, Firewall's relationship with the Commonwealth is fairly accommodating. Magnus Ming deserves much credit for taking saunas with the right people during Firewall's early years. It goes to show: when you need back-room political deals made, send a tenured university professor. ■

XMODE2: FIREWALL FOUNDED

Xmode 2 was held in AF 1, again hosted by the argonauts (but for the last time). Much had happened in the prior year. The keynote speech, which was to have been delivered by Magnus Ming, turned into a referendum on the future of the Eye. Ming said a few words of welcome, then yielded the floor to Maddy Bainbridge. Leaving aside previous disagreements over AGIs and other issues, Bainbridge addressed the Schism, the new threat posed by the gates, ongoing concerns with the TITANs, and increasing hostile encounters with the evolving Project Ozma. Now, more than ever, she argued, the Eye needs to act as

WINKEL, BALKTICK, WOOLF, AND LAM

Posted by: Cathar, Firewall Router,
Earth-Luna Lagrange Point <Info Msg Rep>

Not their real names, these four old timers are pre-Xmode 2 cranks who've been perma-banned from the Eye. Winkel and Balktick briefly ran Firewall-esque cells of their own, though not together, as they hated one another. Nowadays, we simply keep an eye on them—in part to keep them out of Ozma's way, and in part so that they don't recruit any more fucking amateurs to bumble in and make a hash out of what should have been a proper fucking Firewall op. Yeah, don't get me started on these guys. ♣

a unified organization to seriously address x-risk concerns. Transhumanity's situation grew more precarious by the day.

Bainbridge moved that the original business of the conference be curtailed in favor of writing and adopting the laws of a formal organization. The motion carried by a huge majority.

In the intervening days, the membership of the Eye, making heavy use of subjective time dilation, drafted and voted on rules establishing the current organization of Firewall. Aside from establishing the roles of servers, proxies, and sentinels, they affirmed the rights of all sapient members of the transhuman extended family to serve in Firewall, and they adopted somewhat liberalized guidelines for study of TITAN war gear, xenoartifacts, and other potentially dangerous materials.

Now constituted as an organization (and light a few of its most contentious members), Firewall moved with new vigor.

EARLY SUCCESSES

Within a few months of the commencement of extrasolar exploration via the wormhole gates, Firewall was able to infiltrate sentinels onto gatecrashing teams. A research server consisting of a rotating group of nanotech specialists, xenobiologists, cyberneticists, physicians, and electronic warfare experts ran extensive tests on each gatecrasher's morph on their return. The amassed data lead to the conclusion that gate travel, while it might have some other Faustian aspects we can't detect, isn't in and of itself physically harmful or an infection vector.

On Mars, Firewall cells centered around the big Martian cities infiltrated the criminal arms trade. Here they used their networks to create an effective warning network against trade in surplus TITAN war gear and other dangerous hardware. It wasn't long until the arms brokers moved their deals to more remote areas. When they did, Firewall followed.

On Luna, Firewall picked up the trail of the Cult of the Destroyer. Infected by material smuggled from the New Mumbai Containment Zone, the Cult had adopted a corruption of Hindu cosmology. They believed that the Fall was the end of one cosmic cycle, but that it fell to them to complete the destruction so that Creation could be reborn. Lunar proxies and sentinels traced the Cult of the Destroyer's network, compromised their VPNs, and neutralized the entire group, thwarting its plan to infect the three major Lunar cities with an especially virulent strain of the exsurgent virus.

THINGS FIREWALL DOESN'T KNOW

Many interesting facts remain unknown to Firewall. Either the answers elude us or we restrict our investigations due to qualms over mission security, infection risks, and other dangers. Here are just a few:

- **Who made the gates?** It seems more and more likely that the TITANs found the gates rather than created them—or that they tapped into an existing gate network. Related: Can they make new gates?
- **What effect does gate travel have on the exsurgent virus?** This has never been tested in a controlled manner due to our reluctance to send a living exsurgent to an exoplanet that it could potentially infect.
- **How does TITAN war gear dissipate heat?** Some of their systems use so much energy that it seems thermodynamically impossible for them to emit so little heat. No "magic heat sink" has ever been recovered for study.
- **What is the fate of x-risk researchers left behind?** Firewall's predecessor proto-network of x-threat groups included many allies who didn't make it off Earth or perished in other places across the system (New Mumbai, Iapetus). Due to the infopocalypse destroying their backups, most of these people are presumed permanently dead. A scattering of voices, though, deem them only missing.
- **Who's behind the interdiction of Earth?** Conspiracy theories surround the network of killsats barring travel to and from Earth, but no one's ever definitively proven who's responsible. Incidentally, asking too many questions about this in the Martian media is a fast way to get yourself censored.
- **Do the Factors have FTL, lie about using gates, or have a major base in or near our solar system?** None are a comforting option.
- **Do any TITANs remain in the solar system?** We have no definitive proof either way. ■

FAILURES

One major failure marked Firewall's first few years. In AF 2, the Jovian Republic launched a purge of its military and security services. Over a dozen sentinels were swept up in the raids, brought up on charges, and found guilty by military tribunals. The purge wasn't aimed at Firewall, and indeed, the Republic's intel agencies were probably unaware of Firewall before the raids. They became aware, though. Firewall lost desperately needed assets in a hard-to-infiltrate polity. Worse, the Jovians' interrogators extracted some information on our organization that we rather wished they never had. While the Jovians continue to misunderstand us, their upper echelons of intel know we exist—and that's problem enough.

It was unlikely that Firewall could keep its existence from the various powers in the solar system for long. It is certain that all of the major governments—and a few of the smaller ones—know of us by now. How much they know varies. Some are convinced we are a small, isolated, ineffective nuisance. Others have a tighter grasp on our size, capabilities, and operational procedures. We continue to hide our tracks, sow disinformation, and do what we can to operate below the radar.

FIREWALL IN THE NOW

The Firewall of today is outgunned, underfunded, and sometimes acts like a terrorist organization in the interest of x-threat containment. Many from Firewall's second wave of post-Fall recruits have proven themselves and joined the ranks of proxies. They now form the org's primary day-to-day operations coordinators.

The immediate threat of extinction is now a decade in the past, and the newest crop of recruits reflects this. Many were children during the Fall. Others, the most rare, are Spring Children (including survivors of the Lost project). Most of their memories lie in the wake of near-apocalypse.

Firewall's old guard includes transhumans in late middle age and even some of the hyper-aged elite. Almost all were members of proto-Firewall x-threat groups, groups whose politics didn't always abide one another. Their politics vary from pragmatic and anti-structural to structuralist or conservative, and it may be said that each of the factions in Firewall has one or two elder statespeople.

THREAT RADAR: AF 10

Over the past decade, a series of new dangers have emerged. Each has affected not just Firewall's mission, but its structure, as new servers form to analyze and meet a given x-risk.

ASYNCS

The first async for whom Firewall has documentation was a sentinel at the time, and we keep their

identity quiet. If asyncs emerged elsewhere first, it was covered up thoroughly. The sentinel in question had come into brief contact with TITAN hardware. She'd come up clean on a standard exsurgent virus screening. Later, she reported experiencing a series of strange sensations. She was awash in a constant noise of probabilities, and she could "hear" other people's thoughts if she focused on them. When the source of her newfound talents was finally identified, her server opted not to remove her from duty. To this day, Firewall's use of asyncs remains controversial among proxies.

Years later, when the kids were old enough to be placed in bodies, Firewall crossed paths with powerful Lost Generation asyncs. When possible, some were recruited. This wasn't done without controversy. Even Firewall's pragmatist wing had some reservations about employing asyncs, especially ones as potentially dangerous as the Lost.

Extraterrestrial Dangers

Though we have yet to encounter an active alien civilization via the gates, the possibility exists that gatecrashing will eventually expose us to hostile intelligent life. Likewise, the number of dead civilizations we have encountered is increasing worries that there is a larger, omnipresent threat in the cosmos that we have not yet encountered directly.

Exhumans

The exhuman movement is, like so much else today, a reaction to the Fall. We were almost wiped out, therefore, transhumanity is weak and must advance to survive. Firewall at first concerned itself mostly with the singularity-seeking school of exhumanism, but then exhumans of the bodybuilding school got turned on to raiding TITAN and alien sites. They seek to plunder weapons and data, then return to the fringes of civilization to research their finds. Having divorced themselves from transhumanity, it is clear that they have no concerns about our extinction—and a few actively pursue it.

Factors

Despite their friendly pretensions, Firewall finds it unnerving to have an alien species, with unknown capabilities and agendas, active within the solar system. The Factors keep many secrets, and we should be concerned why they are not more transparent. Though Firewall's policy towards Factors is still being debated, a growing number of proxies is convinced we need to pursue more active operations to find out what we can.

Pandora Gates

It's already been mentioned how the Eye wasted no time in investigating the gates when they went live and began admitting transhuman travelers. The dominant view in Firewall sees the gates as a neutral factor until proven otherwise. While probably useful to the TITANs, the gates also allow transhumanity to establish outposts, enhancing our survival chances.

Gatecrashers remain in high demand for recruitment as sentinels. Given how hard they get screwed by the corps, recruiting them isn't terribly difficult.

Transhumanity

Despite all of our progress, transhumanity still very much has the capability to do ourselves in. The threats of factional wars and superempowering technology linger over us; we can hope that we are smart enough to pursue paths of progress that will lead away from such risks; in fact, many work to guide us in such directions.

Organization

Posted by: Atalee Bonedanse, Firewall Scanner

<Info Msg Rep>

I hope I'm not breaking any greenhorn illusions here, but any dreams of Firewall backing you up with its monolithic "organization" are straight-up wishful thinking. Firewall only barely qualifies as a single organization at all. We don't have much hierarchy, barely any standardization, and only limited information sharing. We're fractured, contradictory, undersupplied, and quite likely rife with enemy spies. Whoever did it first, however, did it right, because despite everything, Firewall works.

Firewall is a brilliant information security puzzle. The biggest threats to an organization are often internal: power-mongers, espionage, misinformation, infection, corruption, politics. The Firewall cell structure fixes that. Firewall is broken into collective working groups called *servers,* and each server contains a number of small operational cells. Each cell and server operates independently, with only limited direct contact with any other Firewall members. Data sharing is managed through a secure and anonymized digital network called the Eye. Secrets in the server stay in the server until they decide to share it, and the server doesn't have any special access to secrets outside of the server except what is shared through the Eye. Similarly, cells usually only have access to what is shared with them.

What this means is that any spies that have infiltrated Firewall—and there are plenty: Jovian, Consortium, ultimate, exhuman—are compartmentalized. They only have access to what their particular cell or server knows (and the "declassified" stuff shared via the Eye). Exsurgent infection, corruption, and abuse of power spread through the organization slowly, as contact with other servers is limited. If one cell is exposed, the others remain safe. The server structure also keeps Firewall safe from Ozma's repeated attempts at curb-stomping us. There is no "Chief of Firewall" they can quietly replace, no board of directors to quietly subvert and manipulate. To control Firewall, they'd need to replace 50.1% of the proxies, and even then I'd bet on rogue servers and spin-off factions growing to fill any gaps.

All of this decentralization comes with a cost: we're disorganized, disparate, sometimes tripping over our own feet. Take a look at a swarm next time it's tasked with moving a massive object. You get some going the wrong way, some hanging on the object uselessly, some wandering off or just transmitting noise. Somehow, though, despite the apparent disorganization of a million self-directing bots, they get the job done. I can't help but look at a group of blind, fumbling, dumb robots who just moved a million times their mass without thinking, "Yep, that's Firewall."

Inner and Outer Circles

Firewall may lean towards the anarchistic side of things, but there is one major element of stratification in its structure: sentinels and proxies. Proxies are the inner circle: they're specialists, are in-the-know, organized into servers, and operate full time behind the scenes. Sentinels are the outer circle: they're organized into cells, coordinated by proxies, know only what they need to, and are primarily part-time field agents. The proxies are the heart and brain of Firewall; they keep the show running and effectively manage its operations. Sentinels are Firewall's hands—they go out and get dirty. The lines aren't always so finely rendered, of course—there are plenty of proxies who take to the field when needed, and some sentinel crews are always on the clock.

So why the hierarchical division? Security, primarily. Simply put, sentinels are our mooks. They're disposable. Since they're the ones engaging in actual operations, they run a much higher risk of getting caught, interrogated, or exposed. If they talk (and these days, most prisoners give up something), they don't have much to tell. It's easy to sever their ties and eliminate any trails back to Firewall. That may sound like a thankless job, but every single one of our sentinels knows this going in. We only recruit volunteers.

The other reason is commitment of resources. With the technology and capabilities we have today, Firewall only needs small numbers of people on deck full-time for each working group. Smaller groups leave a smaller footprint. So the proxies take care of ongoing needs, and we call up sentinels on a case-by-case basis. The much larger network of sentinels is free to go about daily life, whether that's running a biz, creating art, or smuggling the latest nanofab designs. This also gives us some flexibility when activating sentinels for operations—we can tag experts and specialists as we need them, go with our favorite crews when we have time to plan, and in emergencies we can call up whomever is closest to the situation.

Cells

Cells are usually between four and eight sentinels. They are typically coordinated by a specific router proxy, with communication overseen by a vector proxy. For most sentinels, these are the only proxies with whom they will regularly interact.

Firewall Terminology

Here's a handy reference to Firewall jargon:

- **Cell:** A clandestine group of Firewall sentinels.
- **Crow:** A proxy that focuses on research and scientific analysis.
- **Crypt:** A digital cache hidden within the mesh.
- **Eraser:** Heavily armed proxies that are called in to contain threats beyond the capabilities of a normal sentinel cell.
- **Eye:** Firewall's internal social and data-sharing network.
- **Filter:** A proxy that handles social engineering, media manipulation, and cover-ups.
- **Promethean:** A rumored artificial super-intelligence (or group of), allegedly friendly to Firewall and transhumanity.
- **Proxy:** A full-time Firewall agent with an assigned role within a server.
- **Register:** A proxy that handles logistics and finances.
- **Router:** A proxy that coordinates a server's operations.
- **Scanner:** A proxy that collects and analyzes data for signs of x-risks.
- **Scratch Space:** A temporary secret cache of gear.
- **Sentinel:** An on-call Firewall agent that works with a cell on field ops.
- **Server:** A working group of proxies, focused on a particular area or mission.
- **Vector:** A proxy that handles hacking, communications, and online security.

Many sentinel cells are created on demand, as needed to handle different missions. Most routers and servers maintain a stable of sentinels to call upon, picking and choosing from the candidates according to their skill sets and backgrounds to form a cell optimized for a particular task. If the router doesn't have the sentinels they need, they put a call out on the Eye with the mission requirements and others usually respond with recommendations.

Quite a few cells also operate on a long-term basis. Usually, Firewall tries to keep teams of sentinels that work well together. Functional teams benefit from common experience, and they often cover a versatile range of specializations. If a cell becomes too small, too large, or has the wrong skill selection, routers will work to swap assets. Some sentinels end up being part of multiple cells, but usually only in cases where the demands of the cells do not conflict.

Servers

Servers can be anywhere from six to fifty proxies in size. Proxy servers are almost always long-term affairs, each dedicated to an ongoing project or theater of operation. For example, one server might be engaged in a long-term mission to eradicate an

exhuman threat or investigate a system-wide smuggling ring that's trading TITAN tech. Others may simply be overseeing all potential risks in a region such as Elysium, Lunar orbit, or the Neptunian system. Still others oversee ongoing Firewall projects such as Case ASTURIAS or Case FERAL MORAINE. The typical server oversees multiple sentinel cells. Larger servers mean more proxies (and more sentinels), which normally results in more oversight and available resources. Smaller servers react faster to threats, lose fewer resources to overhead, and suffer less from politics and espionage.

Servers operate collectively, making decisions either by consensus or majority vote. A few voluntarily elect leadership roles, though these are held accountable to the group. Servers are frequently dominated by a particular clique or faction. While proxy rotation is designed to reduce this, it's unavoidable. Servers are normally aligned with the geographic region they're associated with. Certain roles tend to attract members from certain cliques. Some servers just have a legacy they just can't seem to shake. Eagle server, focused in Jovian space, was at one time nearly 60% argonaut and autonomist, but the SOPs and cultural inertia were enough to resist significant change until the next rotation came around. In other cases, servers seem to forget their identities pretty quickly. That's the nature of small organizations; remove a few key members and the entire culture shifts. Sometimes servers have an impact on their local environment as well. A few structuralist servers on Titan maintained friendly and open relations with the Science Police and Fleet Intel for several years. Their successes made them effective breeding grounds for winning over new proxies to the structuralist way of thinking.

Proxies are expected to rotate positions once a year, either taking on a new role within that server or moving to another server. This is to help break up power blocs, deter cronyism, and broaden each proxy's skill set and experience. This also has the benefit of keeping operatives from staying in the same role for too long, where they might be identified by our rivals. On the drawback side, it does sometimes restrict the development of tight bonds between server members, though team-building can be improved through a few intensive exercises throughout their tours. In some cases, proxies stay on for longer, especially if their rotation would interfere with an ongoing operation, though this is usually only approved by consensus from the rest of the server.

The rotation is not random; proxies either volunteer for a new gig (in the same server or a different one) and are voted in or another server actively recruits them based on their i-rep. There's also a policy in place to encourage placement by software selection. In theory, this system relocates proxies to the servers that most need them, which both helps successful servers to keep their track records going and nudges less effective ones. The rotation software also intentionally populates servers with

AGENT IDENTITY

Anonymity is the name of the game, and it is expected that all Firewall participants operate solely under their assumed identities. Multiple cover identities are provided to each agent, and most arrange for their own backup IDs privately, in case of emergencies. Each sentinel and proxy also has an anonymized pseudonym that they use for communicating via the Eye.

Sentinels and proxies are supposed to use their cover identities when interacting with each other, in order to limit any potential exposure. In practice, agents who work together over time tend to learn much more about each other, and extensive personal relationships between individuals in a long-term cell or server is quite common. This is not discouraged, as it helps to build camaraderie and trust, which can be crucial to a cell's survival. This is a potential risk with which all ongoing cells and servers must grapple.

Many servers craft special cover identities for their router positions. These personas stay in place even when the original proxy rotates out; their replacement assumes that identity and continues on. If you've been with the same proxy since the Fall, don't think it's because Firewall left them out of the rotation schedule. ■

FRONT GROUPS

It is not unknown for servers to establish their own front groups, behind which they conceal their operations. A front such as a hypercorp office, non-profit research group, gate expedition microcorp, or autonomist working group can be useful in explaining away the server's presence and activities. Front groups are not always easy—the cover requires work to maintain. People might wonder about a hypercorp that does nothing profitable or a body-mod clinic that has sketchy-seeming characters going in and out of the back room at all hours. Some fronts are actually hidden behind legitimate businesses that they control, with clever accounting and misdirection used to conceal what's going on behind-the-scenes. In some cases, servers choose fronts that are themselves illegal, such as a smuggling dens or militant groups, taking an extra risk in order to get even closer to the people, groups, or places they're monitoring. This is the closest servers like to get to field operations, and you can expect them to have plans to shut down the operation and disappear on a moment's notice, leaving a smoking crater if they need to. ■

representation from a variety of cliques, in order to derail factional favoritism. In practice, however, many servers ignore this policy in order to avoid diluting their ideological fiefdom. Others allow it, but replacements may find their new position comes with a heavy dose of political indoctrination or even some arm-twisting to ensure their allegiance to the server's dominant beliefs.

Every few years, the rotation system comes under attack. People argue it guarantees spies are given access to more information and more contacts than they'd have by siloing. We also find a lot of people chaff at having to transition just when they start to get comfortable. While it does make long-term friendships more difficult, it keeps us sharp and makes for a culture that's quick to form new relationships.

Most proxies only work with one server at a time. Rotating proxies isn't effective if proxies maintain membership in multiple servers. A sentinel holding allegiances to multiple servers is a yellow flag for possible espionage. Note that this isn't the same as cooperating with a second server on a single, limited project. It's expected that Firewall assets can pull on one another to complete missions, but you do so with the knowledge and consent of other members of your home server.

How are new servers created? A proxy makes a proposal to the rest of Firewall via the Eye. The proxies then vote and if they agree a new server is necessary, they horse trade as appropriate to create one. Usually this is to fulfill a specific role, either operational or locational (or sometimes, to help ease philosophical differences between competing cliques). Servers may be created with an indefinite lifespan, to meet a particular, near-term goal, or with a predetermined server expiration date. For instance, a small server may be established to monitor Olympus and the TQZ indefinitely. Alternatively, a dozen proxies may be assembled to provide TITAN-busting specialties. Or a few dozen crows and scanners are assembled for a six-month server sampling for basilisk hacks from public communications channels throughout the Consortium. All three of these servers will overlap geographically and operationally and ideally will keep in contact with one another to share sensitive data, though they will operate very differently with divergent goals and methods.

Cross-server communication is primarily managed over the Eye. Proxies sign in and post status reports of current items under investigation, open operations, internal affairs, and so on. Items requiring a vote are posted there as well. It's up to the proxies to decide what in their servers warrants being shared and which operations are still too sensitive to release. Most servers do a good job sharing what Firewall needs to know while protecting their assets. A few think their server is their kingdom, but they toe a careful line. If the other proxies decide they're working against Firewall's interests, it's one vote to toss them out. Firewall personnel frequently have

NOTABLE SERVERS

Cloud-Conceals-Hunter is a recent server, still heavily recruiting sentinels. It's operated by a tight-knit group of five proxies. They actively seek high-risk covert-operations missions and maintain a very high success rate. They use their success to justify a policy of heavy memory editing, fork theft, and maintaining egos in cold storage or virtual training environments between missions. It is widely speculated that they will gradually break off from Firewall. Most of their assets believe they work for one of several false fronts, they rely on an independent computer system for communications, and all inter-server communications is limited to proxy participation in votes. They refuse all proxy rotation requests. Several crows have taken it on themselves to audit the organization, but pre- and post-operational interviews show most of the assets consent to the treatment.

Eagle Server is a mid-sized server of approximately 15 proxies, with a heavy Jovian influence. Primarily aligned with the conservative clique, their focus is on research, political subversion, and covert operations in Jovian space. While officially very committed to Firewall's transparency policies, some habits are hard to break and members tend to fall into old habits of tight hierarchies resistant to outside influence. They are very security conscious, but loyalties between members run deep. Jovians face a higher barrier to entry into Firewall than many, and so the server is surprisingly welcoming to all types, but assets and missions are kept very compartmentalized to guard against espionage.

Lima Server is the descendant of a research group established before the Fall. It's since spawned a dozen servers of its own and struggles to maintain a size below 50 proxies. Lima Server is considered to have written the wiki on Firewall operations. It undertakes all types of Firewall missions, but its focus is on predictive research and organizational effectiveness. Lima encourages a high amount of creativity and risk-tolerance in cells, but puts weight on pre- and post-operations research. Most findings are posted organization-wide for implementation in other servers.

Threadum Server, informally named after the investigation into a proxy by the same name, was recently shut down after findings of abuse of power, political meddling, and racketeering. Threadum and a small band of cohorts established the server as a research organization in the inner system, but in actuality they were using Firewall resources to set up and sponsor anti-Consortium fronts on Mars, Luna, and Mercury. They would fabricate findings to justify missions (in reality terrorist attacks) and skim resources. A pair of whistleblowers brought the abuse to the attention of other servers, who staged their own investigations and eventually set the issue to vote. Threadum was recently captured on Mars associated with one of their own terrorist groups and left for the Consortium to deal with. Those assets not suspected of wrongdoing have mostly been transferred to other servers, but a lot of people have seen their i-rep permanently burned. We're working to track down orphaned cells, still operating with no communication with the (now defunct) server or the remainder of Firewall. ■

personal relationships with members in other servers. The process of using those relationships depends on the servers involved. Many a fight has started from a scanner thinking they'll just send an informal data request to a friend in the next server over, only to find out that email was intercepted and is considered back-channel data-sharing.

PROXIES

Proxies make the server go. We provide the financing, organization, data research, administrative support, and all of those millions of other services which you expect to be available 24/7. Technically we're all equal rank, but we have people who depend on us (and sometimes people who give orders, under the sanction of the rest of the server). In theory, proxies have one dominant role: crow, router, and so on. In smaller servers, we find people filling lots of roles. We also try to avoid over-specialization in favor of cross-domain generalists who are better able to connect the dots and recognize patterns across the data.

SCANNERS: DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Scanners collect and analyze data from throughout the solar system and beyond for signs of x-threats. They are our ears against the pulse of the social networks. We keep agents in every major news outlet, security service, political party, reputation network, and financial market. Data is parsed in bulk by us and uploaded to private servers or corners of the Eye for analysis. The data analysis folks are of the "more is more" school of thought, but due to the sheer quantity of data shuttling around this solar system, scanners are responsible for pulling out only the information that may be relevant to Firewall operations and sorting it by reliability and threat level. Most of the work is done through search algorithms and limited AIs; stuff that requires a more thorough look or specialist expertise is sometimes passed over to crow proxies. The process is prone to a lot of false positives (and worse, false negatives). The volume of data to sift through means we never have enough heads, even with our scanners forking themselves to the limit. Pinpointing the stuff that needs attention takes real skill.

Infomorphs and AGIs are especially popular here, as the profession usually means you're spending thirty hours a day in the mesh. The nature of the job means we need ears in every clade, so specialists in exoplanetary operations, ultimates, Jovians, and inner-system corporate politics are especially well appreciated. Scanners have a professional-level understanding of a broad range of subjects and fields in order to be able to keep up on the traffic, with an emphasis on steganography and cryptography. Larger or more siloed servers may attempt to direct scanners towards a very limited field or location, but proxy rotation means that's rarely the case for long. Scanners tend to keep contact with other servers more often than other proxies, simply due to the need and desire to share data and analysis results with scanners and crows looking into the same fields. Brilliant scanners are the ones with the knowledge base to understand data across a dozen disparate fields, the intuition to realize they're looking at a cohesive story, and the puzzle-solving to figure out that story. Usually we aren't that good, even on those rare occasions we're staring all that data in the face. That's why we tag and sort the data and pass it on to the crows or vectors to draw out those conclusions.

Of all of the proxy positions, this is the one most likely to instigate a new operation. Simply put, scanners are our digital scouts, and they tend to take notice of the enemy first. When something hot comes across their feeds, it is their job to evaluate whether to open a new ops file. This usually means passing their results to the rest of a server for a vote, after which a router is tasked with getting the ball rolling. In some cases, scanners may simply ask to divert more resources to an investigation first, which means they pull in sentinels or even hired contractors (through blind fronts, of course) to do some "direct observation." This authority to kick things off is of course tempered by the scanner's own reliability. A scanner that regularly squawks with false positives is going to be double-checked before we commit resources to it. Servers rapidly come to appreciate a scanner that has a knack for sniffing out real problems. Even with a pro, however, it's always good to doublecheck the results before committing.

Because scanners are the probing organ of Firewall, we tend to get exposed to a lot of espionage attempts, chaff, and noise in the data. Even worse is the transhuman tendency of seeing patterns where there are none. It puts us in a tough place. On the one hand, we can't ignore the signs of an x-threat, but on the other, false calls waste resources—or worse, lead us into traps. Managing your scanner i-rep is pretty important. We can usually rotate scanners out if they're having a rough time. Sometimes it just takes a few months to rest the old noodle before you're back in your prime. Unfortunately, if you're just worthless as a scanner, that's a quick way to get yourself uninvited to Firewall's party.

CROWS: RESEARCH

Crows do the heavy lifting of deep research. They are the ones currently studying, testing, and exploring their fields of interest—many of which happen to threaten the ongoing survivability of transhumanity. Crows include researchers in recovered TITAN and alien artifacts, exhuman design, social conflict and genocide, AI programming, advanced physics and nanotech, and numerous other things that may one day kill us all. It's not all doom-and-gloom, however. Crows also include specialists in fields like habitat engineering, mesh infrastructure, morph design, surveillance systems, economics, and just about any other topic that may serve as a bulletpoint in a Firewall operation's briefing. If it's something for which Firewall may need an expert opinion, then you can assume we've recruited a crow for that. A lot of crow projects are continuations of projects started by the groups that initially came together to form Firewall.

Crows tend to be clustered in servers that focus on their area of interest, often with their own labs. It should come as no surprise that we recruit heavily from the argonauts, and many crow servers in fact work out of dedicated argonaut facilities. The line between a Firewall crow and an argonaut researcher sometimes blurs a little, especially given the wide range of topics Firewall tries to keep ahead of. We don't just work on xenobiology and nanoweapons, but memetics, applied mathematics, physics, economics, simulspace design, and more. Firewall sticks mostly to fields that can be directly applied to our work, but that still makes for a pretty long list. Firewall also maintains a number of black labs; facilities researching truly dangerous technologies. As you can imagine, crows tend not to rotate as much as other proxies. Because of how many labs lean heavily towards the pragmatists, this creates a bit of an ideological bubble Firewall struggles to handle effectively.

A few crows operate on their own, being on call for whatever server needs their input. We can tap these individuals for professional analysis. Sometimes they may smuggle data or equipment out to Firewall, kicking off a new investigation. Frequently, these individuals are also tapped to participate in more active missions.

It's worth noting that most crows have "real" jobs or ongoing projects of their own. Sometimes getting them to focus or produce results in a timely manner can be problematic. I can say from experience, there's almost never a point when a crow's ongoing research doesn't "need their attention" just as Firewall requires their immediate and complete participation in a new investigation. Handling this competition for time can be a major headache. If it can be tied to something they're already looking into, however—well, then you may see some magic happen.

As experts, crows carry the heavy burden of saying whether something is a threat or not. Sometimes there's no way to know without taking it out to the field and blowing something up. Crows sometimes hand off some piece of alien or experimental technology for a sentinel team to test. This is frequently terminal for the team, but the way in which it is terminal can tell us whether what we're handling is an x-threat or not.

ROUTERS: COORDINATORS

Routers are the folk that make things happen. They coordinate operations and do all of the organizational grunt-work necessary to actually achieve Firewall's mission. It's one of the most overworked, security-sensitive, and under-appreciated roles in Firewall. Trust me, I know, and there's a reason I'm only a scanner now.

The router skims all of the data from their crows and scanners and makes sure it gets where it needs to go for further analysis, investigation, or action. Once something is noted as a threat, it falls to the routers to fix it. Sometimes someone else takes the initiative. There's nothing stopping a crow or a scanner from stepping up, but it's not in their job description, so normally it's dropped on a router's desk instead. The router selects and activates a team. "A team" is a broad term; we address threats with sentinels, erasure squads, vectors, or other crazy plans, as needs demand. The router pulls on resources, either from Firewall or from personal networks to equip the team with everything they'll need to succeed. The team goes off to save the day, while the router does their darnedest to keep tabs and activate more resources, as necessary.

Servers vary in how much power they give routers. Structuralist servers normally give routers the full trust and powers of the server. More autonomist servers try to keep routers in check with transparency and open votes. No matter where your server falls on the spectrum, it's your router's name on the mission and they normally bear the brunt of the blame if things go south. When things go well, that glory usually goes to the sentinels, for their hard work and bravery. And after the mission is done, while you enjoy some down-time? Your router is back to channeling data from party A to party B, setting up training exercises, reviewing performance metrics, double-checking rep was properly bumped, tying up loose ends, and collating reports to the rest of the server that yes, that investigation really was both necessary and successful. There's a reason routers have the highest turnover in Firewall.

Me? I'm just taking a long vacation, harvesting the Whiskey rumor mill, and chewing the rag for rookies like you in exchange for drinks. They'll pull me back soon. Routers are always in short supply. But I reckon I've got time for a few more rounds before then.

VECTORS: INFOSEC, COMMS, AND DATA MANIPULATION

Vectors are the hack squad. They primarily provide a support role. A proxy puts in a call to the server's vector teams, and they provide communications, digital intrusion, records collection or manipulation,

sabotage of local infrastructure, or whatever else is necessary. Occasionally they'll accompany an active team on the ground conducting an investigation, but most vectors are averse to getting shot and we have enough hacking talent among our sentinels that that's rarely the case.

It sounds glorious, and I don't want to steal any of their credit, but in practice most of the work we call on vectors for is research or clean-up. The router and vectors aren't usually in a place to act with the same speed and insight as the sentinels on the ground.

Vectors include more than just digital data manipulation specialists—they also include our psycho-engineers. Firewall's wetware-hacking vectors are responsible for cracking and examining egos and, where absolutely necessary, applying behavior modification. Their duties range from psych support for troubled agents and loyalty tests on new recruits to psychosurgical interrogation of hostile operatives and brainhacking countermeasures.

Firewall worries a lot about keeping the vectors happy. After all, they create or wash our dirty laundry. They also get kept on a very short leash. Vectors are held to a high standard in transparency, with suspicious behavior such as side channels or separation of privilege considered violations that are subject to review. Vector squads are heavily compartmentalized (to limit intentional as well as accidental data leakage—remember, the data they handle could destroy Firewall). Unfortunately, vectors tend to be more victimized by partisanship than most. Structuralists may call out pragmatist vectors as x-threats themselves. There have been a number of cases of documented emotional or verbal abuse. Fortunately, vector transparency means these events are thoroughly recorded and can be quickly dealt with.

Registers: Quartermasters

What do you call a miserly, two-faced, fork-tongued, double-dealing snake who skims your pocket to save the universe? If they work for Firewall, they're probably a register. The truth is, Firewall operates on an ad-hoc, shoestring budget. We get income from donations, reselling technology, and investments, plus we have public and secret fabrication facilities scattered throughout the system. While that adds up to hundreds of millions of credits, it has to cover server space, secret operations, black labs, equipment, bribes, salaries, and everything else that keeps Firewall running. Meanwhile, groups like Ozma or the Junta have hundreds of billions to spend on their programs. The registers are the wizards who convert some rep network tit-for-tat into a morph and twenty thousand shares in ExoTech.

The registers don't get a lot of credit, and that's because when they're doing their job, you don't notice them. They manage Firewall resources, including favors, cash, investments, gear, and reservations. Did you egocast in to a waiting morph and a plasma rifle? You have a hotel room and a fake ID? That's the registers twisting arms and moving accounts. Meanwhile, they'll arrange to rent your morph while you're away and skim the profits back into the organization. In the inner system, they pull in credits to finance operations. In the outer system, these are the sorts of people who everyone wants to know: party-planners, the inexplicably famous, marketeers off-loading Firewall excess, fixers, and currency exchangers. In both realms they launder favors and cash to hide the tracks of Firewall movements and oversee safehouses and supply depots. In some servers, they even provide legal services, local contacts, and cultural context on the habitat.

Some factions seem more keen on registers than others. Structuralists frown on a role having so much power behind the scenes and choose instead to invest as much as they can into the hands of specialized routers to provide managerial oversight. Conservatives and backups both adapt well to a robust flow of currency. No server lasts long without registers.

More than once, I've seen registers play politics as well. A proxy who violates social norms finds themselves suddenly without cash or social capital? That's a register somewhere sticking up for the sentinels. Of course, it's proxies who hold the cards. A register who abuses the cash flow will be left out in the cold, so they better be damn sure about what they're doing before they pull rank like that.

Erasers: Combat Specialists

The erasure squad is the mop-up crew. Their skill set includes heavy weaponry, demolitions, and mass destruction. Erasers get called in when the situation has gotten out of hand, when breaking a few eggs isn't enough to contain the mess and the entire kitchen needs to be burned to the ground. Sometimes their presence is justified. Usually it's because a sentinel team fucked up.

Usually Firewall pulls on sentinels to complete an investigation. Our pool of sentinels gives us a selection of people with a variety of skills and the right affiliations to fit in wherever the job may be. Erasers don't require those social ties or real-world experience as much as they need full-time, specialized training in killing things. It's common for erasers to come from military or ultimate backgrounds, where combat operations were a daily routine. Others used to do something else before an unfortunate experience made them unsuitable for that job, and it's just a case of Firewall saying: waste not, want not. It's better not to pry too deep; you don't want to know about whatever they saw or learned to put them on that path. Some erasers are actually kept on ice and only thawed out when needed—they don't have much of a life outside of being a murder machine. The best erasers work in squads, wielding a variety of armaments and tactics against potentially unknown threats. The really scary ones operate solo.

How they're implemented varies. Pragmatists like the "egocast in and blast things" strategy. Backups

OLD FRIENDS

To: <Encrypted>
From: <Encrypted>
Attachments: <Encrypted>

We've been friends from way back, back in the old team. You remember that? I thought I was some fancy shit because I'd just hacked New World Bank and I was ready to take on the world? It was just the four of us back then. You, me, Olga with the crazy, exsurgent-infected brain, and Roget. Remember how Roget walked? His whole torso would twist with each step, like his pelvis was second-hand from one of those joggercize videos, and we'd tease him about it. Every morph he sleeved into, it didn't matter, same stupid twist.

We were the best, back then. Back before Roget cracked and the doctors said it was stress accumulation, he'd never be able to run with us again. Back before whatever it was that happened to Olga, the poor slob. I hope you remember, because that's why I'm contacting you. You're the only one who trusts me enough and is stupid enough to listen to me.

I saw him again. We were doing a job in a little hab near Pandora and things went south. It was beyond salvageable. Whatever it was they found was highly contagious, and it wasn't waiting on anything so pedestrian as inhalation vectors. People were dropping all over. I called it in. We were headed back towards the shuttle when we ran into the clean-up crew coming the other way, all sleeved in some sort of combat-modified steel morphs. They knew our idents so I know they knew we were the sentinels who called them. It didn't matter. They were torching everything. Flamers and seekers, if it moved, it got scorched. Half my team was reduced to ash and scrap in seconds. Fortunately, they weren't chasing anyone in particular, just making a beeline to life support, so I managed to duck out of the way and let them pass.

What would you know, but one of those assholes was walking along with the same, stupid twisting torso. It was Roget. I messaged him. He just responded with some boilerplate, "Stay in cover, everything is safe," and kept on his way. He didn't recognize me. I wonder if he even recognized his own name. But it was him, I'd bet my life on it. Hell, I nearly did.

Listen, I know this sounds crazy, but I need you to do some digging. Check out the attached video, check out his kinesics. Tell me I'm wrong. If I'm not, find out where they're storing his ego. They've done something, and I know he didn't consent to this. I haven't told my router about it. I want to imagine there's an explanation, but I'm afraid what I'll do if there isn't. ♣

frequently prefer the "sneak in and blast things" variant. Conservatives tend to go for a "get them close and blast everything from a distance" approach. Regardless, you should notice a theme here. Many servers do without erasure squads altogether, preferring sentinels to not fuck up in the first place, then tasking them with clean-up when they do.

Look, I know plenty of sentinels fancy themselves as erasers. You aren't, and you don't want to be. Erasers are fucked in the head. You don't get a job killing thousands of people full-time without knocking a few screws loose. In our server, the erasers were kept in training simulators when not in use. We only pulled them out as a last resort, when things are beyond recovery. If you see an erasure squad, you're already a target. If you're on an erasure squad, it's because you're already the monster. Consider yourself warned.

FILTERS: SOCIAL ENGINEERS

Erasure squads are scary because they'll atomize your morph. Filters take it to a whole new level. Upset them and you'll find out you're an ego trader specializing in children and all your passwords and accounts are splashed across the breaking newsfeeds. Good luck walking that one off. We call them in, both during and after the mission, to keep everyone off the real trail. When you set the nuclear plant into meltdown, they're the ones who link the nuclear engineers to petal abuse and gross incompetence.

The good news is, the filters work with a light touch when they can, and they recognize that a hypercorp can take a rep hit in ways that a private citizen can't. Whenever possible, they pin things back on organizations or legitimate bad guys. That's good, because you can't restore a reputation from backup. The social engineers also work as an offensive weapon, destroying the reputations of spies, attackers, and exhumans so thoroughly that the best they can hope for is to work cleaning bathrooms.

In addition to relying on their own g-rep and f-rep, filters tend to keep good working relationships with scanners, crows, vectors, and sentinels, as these individuals provide critical visibility into networks and an easy point to inject changes. Usually their work is fairly straightforward; organizations are looking for someone to pin the blame on. Hand them a name and just cause and they'll do the rest. Occasionally, they require more invasive methods. This may warrant activating a vector squad for a more comprehensive digital assault or assembling a sentinel team to properly seed evidence, prime witnesses, play a few memetic attacks, and tidy up any evidence of any competing accounts.

SENTINELS

Most of our assets are sentinels. Lots of proxies like to write off sentinels as hobbyists or the reserves just called upon to meet shortfalls in the organization, but that's selling you short. In practice, sentinels are used like the duct tape of the organization, which is to say: for everything. Sentinels are tapped to do research, forward up alerts from the feeds, conduct social engineering or hacking missions, re-appropriate technology for testing, test technology Firewall picked up from elsewhere, and of course, conduct investigations and remedial actions. The only defining trait of a sentinel is that you're there when we need you—and you're somewhere else when we don't. Whereas proxies barely exist at all outside of Firewall, sentinels have full-time lives they attend to.

THE MAKING OF MONSTERS INTO MYTH

Posted by: Gavin Gladwell <Info Msg Rep>

Ever wonder how exsurgents and asyncs stay out of public discourse? Thank the Firewall filters. Even though exsurgent monstrosities and other horrors were on the newsfeeds during the Fall and still pop up on an unfortunately regular basis, these accounts are undermined as hoaxes, hallucinatory agents, or creative vid/sim editing. When the authenticity can't be denied, it is explained away as TITAN experimentation. People who claim that viral alien horrors and crazed psychic mutants actually exist are safely tagged as trolls or conspiracy theorists and ignored. No one takes it seriously—at least until they see it in person, and we take care of that with memory edits. Sure, you'll find mention of asyncs and jellies and more in the darker areas of the mesh, but no one pays attention—except us and groups like Ozma.

Firewall can't take all of the credit; it's a group effort. Ozma, Oversight, the hypercorps—even the Titanians—are all in on it. No one wants to spook the public. Stories are edited, covered up, and made to go away, one way or another. Sometimes we compete to see who can get to the cover-up first and put their own unique spin on it. ♣

Each server maintains a list of sentinels grouped by team, noting in their dossiers their skill sets, theaters of operation, any job preferences, as well as their public encryption key and encoded contact information. When an operation gets put together, we'll contact you for any jobs that match. When you're a sentinel, things tend to be pretty fluid, to a point. Most sentinels are on-call, meaning that you go about your lives and keep your router up to speed on your location and activities. When an op comes your way, you're expected to drop everything you're doing and take care of it. This can be damn inconvenient, but that's the glamorous secret agent lifestyle for you. At least you can do normal life things in between the occasional bouts of tension and terror. Some sentinel cells prefer to live the full lifestyle, going right from one job to the next. Routers usually accommodate this; if they don't have the next mission lined up, they'll let the cell apply for open postings on the Eye. They might not always give approval for taking on ops with other servers, however, especially if there's some sort of factional rivalry going on between servers or they simply think the mission will take you too far away or for too long. Among routers, poaching sentinels from other servers/routers is considered bad form, but it sometimes happens out of necessity.

Who has access to a sentinel's dossier? It varies based on the server. Structuralists tend to give everyone in the server access. Conservatives like to limit it to just

the router. A sentinel's real identity, including anything which might identify them on the outside, is protected and kept within the server. Servers also maintain more sensitive data, including each sentinel's biography and psych profiles, but these are kept in offline storage, only accessible to the vectors and medical personnel responsible for protecting and assessing them. If the sentinel team has a dedicated router, they probably get redacted copies as well. For most everyone else, they have to operate off of the sentinel's i-rep and Eye profile. If a sentinel cracks, it's the responsibility of the routers and vectors to make a proper assessment. What happens after that depends on the server.

If it seems like the router sees a lot, it's because they do; they have to be able to make executive decisions and manage their people safely and effectively. Meanwhile, sentinels barely see anything—they operate on a strict need-to-know basis. We ensure they know who they're working for and why—we can't afford to have loyalties challenged while in the field. Then we give them just enough information for them to finish their mission, and try to avoid feeding them anything they don't need or which might confuse matters. Don't take it personally, it's just good opsec.

Overall, we try to keep our sentinels fed and happy. They need to be sharp, independent, and willing to do what needs to be done. That sort of attitude doesn't come from arm-twisting. In that sense, sentinels hold one of the cushiest positions in Firewall … discounting all of the brain parasites and laser amputations you lot seem to fall into. I'm not complaining—keeping your sentinels happy is necessary if we're going to do what needs to be done. I'm just saying it would be nice if you bought us a gift card or something now and again.

Other Firewall Roles

Firewall is a big organization. As such, we have plenty of personnel filling any number of other roles critical to the functioning of Firewall. Not all of these easily fall into the proxy-sentinel dichotomy or even the defined proxy positions. We still need people to manage the maintenance robots, conduct repairs, courier sensitive packages, infiltrate various groups, provide on-site medical services, and so on. A lot of proxies will handle double duty on these tasks, along with their primary responsibilities. Otherwise we turn to sentinels, ally assets, and contractors, in that order. When it comes to allies and paid help, we tell them nothing about Firewall. If we trust them enough to talk about Firewall, we usually recruit them as sentinels.

Administrative Functions

Most sentinels never get to see how Firewall executes administrative functions, especially how we keep our hangar of sentinels well stocked. There's a few reasons we keep this stuff opaque. First, if Ozma knew our HR methods, we'd have even more spies than we already do. There's also the fact that some of our methods don't paint us in a very good light when taken out of context. While things vary a lot from server to server, the fact is most proxies will justify anything when measured against the extinction of transhumanity. With a lot of thought and planning, we've avoided having to do that "anything" so far, but sometimes it feels like we get pretty damn close.

Recruitment

Proxies are given a free hand to recruit who they like. A surprising number of recruits come straight from the field, with contact initiated by sentinels. If someone fights back against a swarm of seething exsurgents that would drive the average shmoe insane, it tells us they've got the gumption and the motivation we're looking for. Usually recruitment by a sentinel in the field is as quick as "come with us, we'll explain on the way." This falls into the "we trust sentinels to show good judgment" category. When I hire people, I give a little more thought as to what I'll do if they say no.

Firewall is a secret organization. It's not going to stay secret by asking everyone we meet if they want to join. So when I'm looking to recruit, first I get a copy of their ego. Yeah, that's right, we arrange a forknapping. I push that up to my vectors to do a full psychological evaluation and simulspace interview. Firewall comes back telling me whether the candidate is appropriate for the job, what the likely answer is, and what bait to dangle to bring them in. If the answer is no, I walk away. If it's yes, I set up a meeting to make a formal offer. Here's where things get skeevy, so hang on. Now and again, the profile says they'll say yes, but in reality they say no. At that point, the safest clean-up is to kill them in such a way that the stack can't be recovered. An airlock or other mechanical malfunction is normally a good cover. We make sure they get restored from a backup—that conveniently doesn't remember our offer—quickly. It's dirty, it doesn't come up much, but I've done it. Then I keep that person on the list for "ask again later."

Sometimes you run into someone with the skills Firewall needs when they're not being rescued from exsurgent monsters. How do I win over someone who has a lot to lose by participating in a system-wide conspiracy? The warm, snuggly feeling of saving transhumanity isn't enough for some people. That's okay, Firewall attracts all types. It seems we cater to adventurers chasing the rush in a post-death world, people driven by a burning hunger for vengeance, freedom fighters, fugitives, smugglers, profiteers, fringe scientists, and the professionally curious. The Firewall network gives access to resources that transcend factional boundaries and legal restrictions. We give the tools and support to help people achieve their own counter x-threat goals. Most importantly, we give respect. At best an artifact hunter is considered a con-man. We consider them heroes.

Whatever the hook is, I figure it out early. That's not normally too hard; learn enough about anyone

and we can assemble a pretty solid psychological profile. A fork is better, but not always easily available. Not all proxies do this the same way, but I like to pull them in piece by piece. For most people, it's a series of carefully laid out personal experiences and relationships. We try to surround them with friends and enemies who plant little concepts and ideas, and work to extinguish those memes which will make them resistant. For the more calculating sorts, we seed their environment with favorable articles, equations, and findings, while undermining their current ideological structure. This is called priming the target, and I don't mind admitting I'm not half-bad at neurolinguistic programming when I've got a couple of filters behind me writing the script. Finally, I pull in some sentinels and vectors to create an "event." A market hiccup, a simulated nanoplague, legal action, whatever. Just something to test that person's beliefs. Once their understanding of the universe and their place in it is properly put into disarray, I appear, not as an out, just as a different road than the one that took them here. Some people prefer to hire the target on for bigger and bigger jobs, going with the "frog in boiling water" technique, but I find those recruits tend to see Firewall as just a job, and Firewall can never be just a job. Our work is too important—and the pay is too low—for anything but true believers. Provide a "road to Damascus" situation and that's what you'll get.

Yes, this process has a certain amount of slime in it. Like they say, if you like biofuels, don't watch how they're made. We use these methods because they work, and because one delicate egg getting cracked is an acceptable loss in the grand scheme of things. I hear that some routers follow a different ethics release number, and have some compunctions against egonapping and mind-wiping. The truth is, not every router does things like this. We have competing manuals on how to recruit floating around the Eye, including the hardcore "snatch an ego, modify it, run it through a loyalty test, and toss into the fight" all the way to "ask nicely with an NDA in hand." All of us have one thing in common: the recruiter is responsible for the recruit. If I contact you and you start blabbing, I take the rep hit. Some people are all right with that, as long as they can go to bed feeling clean as an operating room. Unfortunately for them, there's a second factor to consider. Most of us agree that Firewall needs to stay secret. Some of us agree more vehemently than others. If your recruit starts streaming the Firewall-interaction highlights from their lifelog, some hardliner within Firewall is likely to pick up on it, and your recruit will disappear (and if Firewall doesn't get to them, Ozma will). I feel bad spacing someone for saying no, but I feel better knowing I'm freeing them from a lifetime of carrying a secret that will get them egonapped or permanently dead if they tell the wrong person.

The good news is, once you're in, things change. Smart routers realize that it's respect that keeps good agents in the organization. A sentinel who is afraid their ego is being modified between jobs isn't going to stay long. A scanner won't sign up if they think their memories will be wiped when they decide it's time to retire. Handling our agents with respect is the one time we break the data containment rules. Agents' egos are sacrosanct. Free agency rules supreme. Router training says we never force anyone to take a job, we never conduct unnecessary or non-consensual ego modification, we don't secretly delete memories. I can't say those rules are followed universally. Servers that break them tend not to last long, but then some aren't created to last for long. Some require a recruit to consent to invasive procedures up front—if they don't, they aren't brought in. A proxy who maintains a cold storage of memory-altered agents they pull

PRIVACY VS. SECURITY

Start Æther Jabber
Active Members: 2

Brainwave: This agent token thing is an awful idea. It sets the tone that sentinels can't trust their routers and encourages them to post their secrets and feelings about it in some unsecured journal somewhere. This is just begging for someone to steal data and map out Firewall operations, and it'll get people killed. My server provides secure storage to each sentinel for this sort of thing. I'm sorry, but feeling cozy takes distant second to protecting transhumanity.

Sassyfrass: Hey, I'm not going to say you don't have a point. But you're going to find that recruitment in servers that do that is way down. When people don't know if they can even trust themselves, it causes its own set of issues. We're already trusting these people to pull our toes out of the reactor. Trust them to know how to keep their own bunks tidy when it's done.

Brainwave: I'm not saying they're going to try to exfiltrate data. I'm saying they don't have the knowledge or resources to keep that data safe. This isn't something you can protect by just messing with privacy settings. The best policy is to wipe memories after a mission. Next to that, you contain everything in a space you control. Then you know everyone is up to standards.

Sassyfrass: No one is forcing anyone to post anything, and short of wiping memories, we can't much stop them from posting it either. We're just saying, have a place that's secure enough you can trust it—against the bad guys and against Firewall. Not everyone knows how to set one up on their own, but you can buy them cheap or ask your router or a friend to set one up. It's easier to fix than fear in the people you should be trusting. Firewall doesn't work like your military hierarchy, stop trying to make it. ❀

DIRTY MINDS

To: Muldrew, Router
From: Higgs

Consider this notice of termination. I'm out. I signed up for saving the universe. Instead I've been at Max-Bods for six months, copying egos awaiting farcasting. I know you said they'd be okay, but I don't know what you're actually doing to them and this is some skeevy shit. I'm okay with smuggling out sentinels. Those guys give consent. Not this. I remember my training, I'm going to keep your secrets. But I've got a lot of soul-searching to do.

Don't message me back.

out as needed will get the blind eye as long as it's all voluntary and doesn't shake the trust of agents in other servers.

To back our sacrosanct-ego policy, Firewall SOP encourages each recruit to keep a non-Firewall data storage location for ego hashes, private journals, or whatever else they need to confirm we haven't been tampering in their brain box between jobs. We call that data stash the agent's token, and its safety is sacred.

Once the recruit knows the basics—Firewall is at war against the big black of extinction, our basic SOPs, and the mission parameters—we try not to share anything more. Everything is need-to-know, and if you're a fresh recruit, you don't need to know. Once you're accepted by Firewall, it's time for us to put you to work.

ADVANCEMENT

Firewall advancement is a strange beast. The primary push to bring in more proxies is operational needs. When a server is looking to grow, they usually look to proxies on rotation first. Barring that, they'll scan the sentinels they have on hand, looking for ones with the skill sets they need. Experience is not always a factor. The best field ops are often too valuable to bring out of the field. On the other hand, the longer you're a sentinel, the more "need to know" information you pick up over time. At some point, this can be considered a liability, and it may be safer to Firewall's future ops to bring you to the inner circle. If you're looking to advance—whether you're sick of the stress of field ops, or you just think your skills could be put to better use—the best agenda is to make yourself useful. Respond to requests for assistance on the Eye and voluntarily put your own time in on projects that Firewall might value. Eventually someone is likely to notice.

Advancing to proxy requires a proposal by an existing proxy, passing the vote, and getting access granted. Unless a proxy blocks you, congratulations, you're now as underappreciated as I am. Getting promoted to proxy is a big deal; it's basically full-time-and-a-half Firewall. That magical transformation varies by server. Some let people serve as a proxy while still maintaining their other commitments. Others require something a little more serious.

The most common route is forking. One fork leaves their old life and identity behind so they can live the Firewall life, with all the secrecy and sucking chest wounds that involves. The other consents to some mild psychosurgery to forget the promotion ever happened (and possibly is pushed out of Firewall altogether). Yeah, there's another Atalee out there. I hear she's better with company. Some people don't ken well to that, though, and Firewall being what it

NEW RECRUIT

Start Æther Jabber
Active Members: 2

Proxy A: Hey, you know how in most servers, it's SOP to send a copy of the fork of potential recruits to [REDACTED] server?

Proxy B: Yeah, that's just for archiving purposes, right? System redundancy?

Proxy A: That's what I always thought, but the weirdest thing just happened. We were in the process of bringing in an asset we'd had as an ally for months, very much sentinel material. We snagged a copy of their fork, per usual, and ran them through the standard loyalty tests and recruitment pitches. Everything was looking golden. We had plans to recruit them tomorrow.

Proxy B: What happened?

Proxy A: We just got word from [REDACTED] server that the potential recruit is a deep cover ExoTech agent.

Proxy B: Holy smokes. Wait a minute—how did they know?

Proxy A: I'm still not entirely sure, but everything points to them running tests/interrogations on the fork we gave them. Not only are they not just an archive, but they seem to have psych-scanning methods that are a step above what our server can do.

Proxy B: Let me guess, you looked into them, but it's all above your clearance.

Proxy A: Yep. Everything that server seems to do is so classified it might as well be on another plane of existence.

Proxy B: So what're you going to do with the recruit?

Proxy A: Recruit him, but feed him snipe hunts. We're going to see if we can draw out what ExoTech is looking for, maybe gain some insights into their ops. The psych profile that [REDACTED] gave us is so thorough, we'll have him eating whatever we feed him for months.

is, they're free to do something about it. As a sentinel, you can try to switch to a router with another, more liberal server and get your promotion there.

Before you're upgraded from sentinel to proxy status, you can expect to be called in for psych and philosophy evals. There's really no getting around this. No, you can't get those done yourself and send them to us, nice try. Even if you got pulled in by some maverick sentinel in the ass-end of the system, there isn't a single server out there that will accept a new member who hasn't been through a nice, friendly, psychosurgical interview. We can't risk letting infiltrators, exsurgents, or people with destructive or toxic personalities into our inner operations. When you accept that promotion, you're letting go of your mental privacy. They'll go through your entire life history, and they'll doublecheck the details. In some cases, they might even bring in some past acquaintances—voluntarily, if sentinels, forknapped if not—to corroborate your story. Expect to answer some uncomfortable questions—we all have secrets. You can also expect to be run through some simulations. We need to know how you'll react when the world is collapsing around you. On the positive side, we'll excise those memories if you like.

Firewall attracts all types, and we have all kinds of jobs. If you're a crackerjack, expect to get the sorts of jobs you can't mess up. If you are of a politically-unfriendly persuasion, such as a die-hard bioconservative or a corporate stooge, you're going to find yourself carefully contained and generally underutilized. That isn't to say we don't have Jovians, oligarchs, and so on. They've just proven beyond a shadow of a doubt that they're team players when it comes to fighting x-risks. Still, allegiances run thick, and some servers are far more hostile than others.

Termination

The sun sets for each of us. Hopefully when we go it's with a good word and fond memories. Voluntary separation is a tough spot for Firewall. The truth is, even a low-level sentinel can walk away with more information than we're comfortable parting with. This comes back to respect. Unless we put you on a job you knew would result in lack, we let you leave on your good word you won't share what you know. There's always the option of voluntary psychosurgery to suppress difficult memories. This is more frequently taken to stop the nightmares than out of respect for Firewall's secrecy, but it still happens. In either case, the philosophy is: we left your brain alone when you were on the job, we'll leave it alone when you're off. Of course, proxies who happen not to subscribe to that philosophy will handle things differently, but they're the exception.

Involuntary separation is rarely so gentle. If you fucked over the organization, if you've proven yourself untrustworthy or dangerous, hostile to Firewall, or a self-serving tyrant, then you are now a threat, and Firewall will bring its assets to bear against you. Psychosurgery is considered the gentle approach. Setting you up for a fall so hard you get sentenced to final death is considered much tidier. Don't fuck us over. Firewall is not in the business of playing games.

In either case, once you're back in civilian life, we try and keep tabs on you for a few years. The information you know gets less sensitive with time, and having your router check in is good for helping you transition smoothly (or to reconsider your decision). Of course, should your router notice you're writing a tell-all exposé, it's time to activate the vectors and filters so we can revisit the "involuntary separation" options.

Thanks for the Memory

To: <Firewall Node 898847638>
From: Living the Truth

Best way to hide a lie is between two truths. They wipe everyone. Us sentinels? There's too much dirty laundry in our heads to let that walk out the door. How many of us do you think there are? Five hundred? Five thousand? Way too many for Firewall to keep its secret with pinky swears. One day you wake up in the clinic with no memories and all of your backups mysteriously lost, and that's the happy ending. Proxies? They can't go back. They don't have a life to go back to! When a proxy breaks with the pack, they're spaced. Open your eyes! I've seen it happen myself and I can send the files to back it up.

Look, I'm sorry to be the one to share bad news. I didn't know when I signed up either. But it's better to know the Firewall retirement plan now, while you're still useful.

To:<Firewall Node 898847638>
From: What-did-I-just-read?

LtT, you need to get your head checked. If Firewall wanted disposable assets, there are plenty of sentinels who would volunteer to be forked, modified, and destroyed without any of your conspiracy. Remember, this is a volunteer organization from top to bottom, and we all have to sleep in the bunk we make. I've had friends retire and they're doing just fine in civilian life. ♣

Firewall Governance

So who calls the shots? Who directs Firewall, who administers everything? The answer is everyone and no one. Despite the rumors, there's no secret council or governing body. In large part due to the autonomist influence in Firewall's early days, everything is handled through direct democracy. For most day-to-day affairs, servers run their own show. They decide what operations to pursue, they handle their own admin, they're in charge of their own opsec, and so on.

They are also expected to collaborate when it comes to sharing resources. This doesn't mean they operate without restrictions. Every server is expected to adhere to Firewall's mission statement, and those that don't are held accountable. Servers that stray off the reservation are voted out and cut off—or worse, actively hunted and shut down.

Decisions affecting the entire organization are uncommon, but they happen. Any proxy can initiate a proposal, but for a vote to be called they need to get 500 proxies to back the measure. Officially, settling proposals is straightforward: every proxy gets a vote. Since we all operate anonymously, that vote is cast using our private keys. Majority vote wins. Simple, right?

The i-rep of the proxy that authors it makes a big difference in how likely the measure is to get traction. The individuals proposing the measure normally meet with different opposition groups to nudge and alter the proposal to something approaching a compromise. There's an internal understanding that minorities sometimes get screwed in majority-vote situations, so there is usually—but not always—an attempt to acknowledge their concerns. Faction politics play a major role here. A lot of these issues are hashed out over the Eye, but in an organization built on anonymity and secrecy, the real decision-making is often made in side-channel negotiations, back-room deals, rep-twisting, and even a little back-scratching. This means that a proposal's success is often settled before it even comes up for a vote. For a decision voted on by every member of the group, the process can be very opaque. There's also the matter that sentinels are excluded from this process. While there are security and compartmentalization reasons for this, there's something to be said in that sentinels outnumber proxies and arguably face the repercussions from Firewall's group decisions more directly, as they are in the field. There's an ongoing and heated debate over this issue, pushed strongly by the structuralists, but ironically most sentinels are unaware of it.

A number of Firewall-wide decisions involve devoting resources to large operations—specifically, operations that require multiple servers to work together. Quite a few votes involve establishing new servers to take on fresh operations. Others deal with operational minutiae or handling servers or proxies that have not been adhering to the game plan. The vast majority of org-wide decisions, however, are policy matters. You may have noticed all of the policy docs on the Eye? Well those are guidelines for handling Firewall operations, and they've been hashed out over months and years of debate. This is where faction politics really raise their ugly little heads, and the policy forums resound with their ongoing clashes. A lot of these issues are hypotheticals and what-if scenarios, but some of them have real consequences to our operations. The whole reason Firewall tolerates asyncs, for example, rather than killing them or locking them away, is because the pragmatists pushed through and won a vote on the matter, and it's now official Firewall policy. The conservatives still grumble about that one, but for the most part, they adhere to it.

Of course, given the independence each server has, Firewall-wide policy mandates are in some ways more like declarations. Since we all have limited visibility into other servers, it's difficult to see how closely each toes the Firewall party line. Let's say your server decides the ultimates are an x-threat that need to be nudged back a bit, which goes against Firewall policy. As long as you keep your operations secret, there won't be any fallout. If it

is discovered, however, you can expect your proxies to be held accountable—so it's in their best interest to stamp out that sort of thing. No one signed up for Firewall out of their own best interest, though, and wisdom and group pressure often lose out to ideology.

Outside Influences

Firewall has a few bosom friends, as well as some powerful patrons. While they don't have votes (that we're aware of), they still have clout. If the director of the lab for femto-materials sciences says they only want a particular server to have access to the lab or they'll cut off their support, that's a request Firewall heeds. We even have a few oligarchs in our ranks who are used to their word being law. While Firewall will never kowtow to them, we're willing to tip our hats when it opens doors. This leads down a dangerous road. Many outspoken members are firmly against "selling out." Usually, though, the pragmatists can negotiate out a deal everyone feels is advantageous.

The faction most deeply embedded with Firewall is the argonauts. They have their fingers everywhere. They host many of our computer systems, they're well-represented among our proxies, they provide data analysis, and they're generous with funding. The result is, Firewall politics can be a little sensitive to the current argonaut party line. We've struck a good balance. The argonauts seem comfortable with Firewall operating independently, even when we foul up some of their operations. When they request our support or ask to participate in a particular investigation, however, the vote normally passes without too much fuss.

Conflicts and Issues

Nobody has an exact count on the number of proxies and sentinels in Firewall. What's clear is we have several thousand people plus forks, all with their own idea of what Firewall should be like. Each with their own motivations, fears, methods, and psychoses. We have war criminals working with refugees, Jovians defending mercurials, Lifeboat vets sharing a capsule with new-school hypercorp black hats. When things work well, it restores your faith that maybe transhumanity is worth fighting for after all. When they go sour, everyone is arguing with the full conviction that their opponent is on the side of extinction, while our reluctant sentinels make for the hatch with Firewall's crown jewels.

The point is: conflict happens. A lot. Both within Firewall and with outside entities. How we deal with it has become an art all of its own.

Internal Conflicts

It is very difficult to pull rank in Firewall. Some servers actually do establish a hierarchy, which they enforce through duty assignments and rep penalties. Even without a command structure, servers have a code of behavior by which everyone is expected to abide. Rarely will Firewall fall back to such antiquated notions as sending someone to the brig, unless that individual is clearly a threat to Firewall operations and is awaiting a proxy vote for incompetence or treason. However, trust creativity to fill that gap. A proxy rotated into a hostile server may find a year behind bars a welcome reprieve compared to the "corner office" treatment, inundated with busy work and surrounded by hostile compatriots. The fact is, you need to adapt to your assignment. At worst it's one year before you're on to your next tour. There's nothing that prevents proxies from rotating out early, either.

The reputation system does a lot to fix this. Someone who consistently bucks the trend will get down-voted and passed over for juicier assignments and better equipment. Meanwhile, a proxy who elects themself as server boss may find their rep score so low they couldn't lead a servitor. Newbies sometimes complain the reputation system isn't fair, but even they figure out how to live with it eventually. Rep encourages people to be polite and work together, and with a flat organization like ours, that's gold.

For sentinels, life is a little different. Frequently all sentinel traffic is routed through just one or two proxies, and sentinel reputation votes aren't weighted as heavily as those of proxies. Plus, sentinels don't rotate, and proxies don't always transfer their sentinels over to the new guy when they rotate out. This means some proxies can and do pull rank. Usually it's for the better. Your proxy has been dealing with this stuff for a long time, they deserve a little faith.

Factionalism

Factionalism undermines the whole rep system. Voting blocs can buoy bad apples and sink good ones, while insulating internal problems from review and analysis. Cliques based on ideologies are to be expected; you support people you agree with. Some people hold onto those cliques a little too tightly or bring in their outside politics in determining who they do or don't like, and that sort of shit doesn't flush. Some people also practice retaliatory down-voting. If you down-vote that other guy just because they're a mercurial and people suspect that, expect some negative feedback. Some simply only help their friends and toss mushy apples at the cliques they don't like. This happens a lot around big votes.

How do we handle this? Not too well, I'm afraid. It's a work in progress. Proxy rotations help a little. It breaks up those tight circles and just plain exposure to people from the other side helps shut down biases. Still, Firewall is firmly rooted in the autonomist tradition, which means less-represented (and less rep-happy) groups like the Jovians tend to suffer. Does the Consortium invasion of Locus qualify as an x-threat requiring (justifying?) Firewall intervention? That sort of thing can split Firewall into pieces, and most of the combat is in those smoke-filled chat rooms. Even in the day-to-day, our natural instinct is to help people

who think and act like us, and brush off the Jovian who just doesn't "get it."

It's an issue with a few thousand forum threads discussing it, but don't expect it to be resolved any time soon.

Operating at Cross-Purposes

Unfortunately, coordination across servers is a little complex, and it's not uncommon for multiple Firewall teams to be assigned to the same x-threat, totally unaware of each other. There are even cases where different information has led to different Firewall teams being assigned in opposition to one another; one is assigned to destroy the target, the other to recover it for study. In theory, routers and the Eye should limit our working at cross-purposes, but the span of Firewall operations and our focus on information control mean it's inevitable.

Infiltrators

You're already familiar with the old standbys: Ozma, TAHI, and their likes. We know we've been infiltrated. They're too good to not have succeeded. We have a few servers dedicated solely to rooting out spies like this—sometimes that new proxy that just rotated into a server is working double duty as a counter-intel operative. What we do when we find these spies varies. Sometimes we draw-and-quarter them, in the psychosurgical sense. We send others on "special operations," tag their accounts on the Eye to limit access, and wrap them up in layers of surveillance so thick a nanobot couldn't squeeze by undetected. When we do it right, they don't even know they've been made. We keep them nicely insulated, but still put them through the regular rotation cycle to all sorts of "high-security" projects where we feed them delicious hand-picked "secrets." The best part is grouping a bunch of spies all together in the same lab or operation, then privately informing each that we suspect one of the others is a mole. They go crazy trying to root out the other spies to prove their loyalty, totally unaware the only legit Firewall agents there are their handlers. We should film that stuff and sell it.

Secret Societies

Firewall has plenty of secret societies. It's a natural consequence when people make friends using only false identities and encrypted communications. We get plenty of little political knitting circles who coordinate forum posts and data releases to support their preferred ideology—usually an extremist fringe of one of the existing cliques. The truly caustic get rep-dinged into oblivion, but for most of them the only real cure is transparency. Once people know they're getting played, they're able to defend themselves. This could be better locked down, but all of the cliques engage in their own private data coordination campaigns, so it would be tough to put the boot to some without that coming back around.

Small World

To: <encrypted>
From: <encrypted>

Vil, I checked over your stylometry results. You're right, the counter-anonymizing algorithm was off, that's why you were getting the anomalous behavior. I made some tweaks, I think you'll find it isn't picking up that odd false-positive from before. I found the problem was the nature of the conversations centered around a limited number of key phrases. I think this soundly disproves your claims that thirty percent of messages on the Eye are sent from such a small number of individuals. In fact, I'm releasing a study next month describing the likely number and demographics of the proxies. I can assure you, there's no central clique like you were suggesting. As a friend, I'll keep this between us, but should your accusations go public, you'll look the buffoon. Better to put this behind you. ♣

Transhumanity is weird, and it gets weirder by the week, so we get lots of other small groups with their own secret agendas. We sure as hell have some singularity seekers in our ranks, hoping than an op brings them into contact with something that will let them transcend to a god-like super-intelligence or be one with the universe. We probably have some aspiring exhumans too. Then there are closeted religious believers, infomorph supremacists, and probably a few leftover freemasons, all working their own fraternal cronyism. Throw in some ascendant forkers who think they can do everything themselves, and you occasionally have a group that's mucking things up for the rest of us.

Hard data on the actual penetration and effectiveness of these circles is impossible. Lots of people like to say that there's a band of secret chiefs who operate Firewall from behind the scenes. I call spacer tales on that. If Firewall was coordinated by some great intelligence, why is it still such a confusing mess? It's one of those stories that sticks around because it's impossible to disprove. On the other hand, if it's true, they've been doing a good job protecting transhumanity for the past ten years. Given the asteroid field we're flying through, I'm not sure it's a great idea to buck them now.

Corruption

Firewall is a big pot of smuggling routes and dirty secrets, just calling out to the Extropian in each of us. It's no surprise some people use it to make a little something something on the side. Industrious

capitalists who "financially incentivize" Firewall jobs for themselves are not unusual. To some degree, it's hard to complain; when you're busy saving the universe, a little inside trading falls into the "break some eggs" category. In fact, some routers use the opportunity for illicit (albeit, not immoral) income as a little sugar in the recruitment pitch. Just bear in mind, big paychecks leave big data trails, so don't get greedy.

Real Firewall corruption is a little darker. Give a proxy access to spies and hit teams, and now and again they think they've got a throne to defend. Yes, we have had proxies activate Firewall assets as a personal army, to push their politics or commit some legitimate mayhem. Just like we have front organizations that officially work for some great cause but actually work for us, proxies have used servers as an extension of some other organization.

I don't think I need to say what happens to those people.

We have seen proxies use their position of power to abuse those under them or depending on them. A proxy abusing another proxy is pretty tough without a hierarchy to enforce it, but abusing sentinels? Some proxies think that's just tough love. These aren't necessarily bad people here, just people who think keeping everything secret, hazing, assigning impossible jobs, and so on are just how proxies are supposed to do it. We have had a few legitimate sadists as well, I'm sorry to say. We stamp this sort of behavior out as soon as we find it. Bad management will gut the organization faster than Ozma could. The issue isn't our motivation to set things right, it's that whole secrecy aspect built in from day one. Sentinels don't always have access to the Eye, and proxies don't normally give unflattering pictures of themselves. It's easy for a proxy to keep a sentinel in the dark without the rest of Firewall being any wiser. Unless there's a particular event to alert us to the situation, we're not too likely to find out about it for a long while.

Sentinel Resentment

Let's face it: sentinels often operate in the dark. They know they're only being told what they need to know, so there's always that voice nagging in their head, wondering what's being kept from them. Even if we give them everything we have, there may be details of which Firewall is simply unaware. When those details nearly take their heads off, they may blame their proxies for holding out on them. Routers rely on building up a relationship of trust, but it's all too easy to have that undermined. There may be an aspect to an op that a router thinks is irrelevant and so doesn't share it, only later to have that decision bite them in the ass. When the sentinels find out they knew something about that all along, they probably won't take it well.

Losing the trust of your sentinels can be a very bad thing. At best, you lose an operative. At worst, that mistrust screws up an op and gets people killed—or the sentinel swaps allegiances. Usually the process is long and slow, and a good router will do what they can to fix things. If the router is oblivious, incompetent, or worse, then sometimes someone else needs to be tasked to come in and clean up the mess.

Arbitration

Once inappropriate activity is detected, a separate server is tasked with looking into the situation. Their report and recommended course of action is brought into a public discussion thread and put to the vote. This process is normally pretty quick. There's no organization-wide legal code, and if there were, half the servers would ignore it anyway. If there are security concerns regarding a specific sentinel or proxy, they are normally put into online storage so they can talk with people and plead their case. Once the vote is taken, corrective actions or punishments are executed immediately. The accused can appeal the decision, but the nature of living under a panopticon means we normally have a pretty heavy body of evidence.

The penalties depend on how egregious the crime is and how popular and effective the proxy is. Some things tend to be swept under the rug: a scanner collecting data on a crush is frowned on and rewarded with a slap on the wrist. Abusing our sentinels or other proxies, providing false data to Firewall or impeding our mission, or crimes against transhumanity are taken very seriously. Because these are all people in-the-know, letting them just walk away from Firewall isn't normally an option. We seek rehabilitation when we can, ego deletion for most other cases, but now and again we get creative.

Not everything goes to a vote. Some servers handle stuff internally. This could be to the offender's benefit or not. Pandora server recently became the subject of some focus because of their heavy-handed response to one of their crows leaking Firewall data. The crow's ego was heavily modified and the older backups were flagged as corrupted. The Eye was on fire for weeks discussing what the appropriate response was (if any), and through the whole thing that crow was defending their server for their actions. Eventually the server was disbanded, but it wasn't an easy call, and I don't expect that same response next time a case like this comes up.

Rogue Servers

There are several known cases of Firewall servers going rogue. Some of these were exiled from the organization but continue to operate with their own agenda. A couple of these were so bad we're still trying to hunt them down. A few simply drifted away from Firewall's goals and policies and severed the ties themselves. At least one of these still recruits sentinels and purports to be part of Firewall—without telling them the full story. For all intents and purposes, we treat these rogues as hostile groups.

THE EYE

Posted by: Qi, Vector <Info Msg Rep>

The Eye is Firewall's communication infrastructure, social network, and data repository. How the hell does a clandestine conspiracy get away with its own social network? That's a damn good question.

INFRASTRUCTURE

All of the piping behind the Eye is considered the tippiest top of top secrets. Presumably there's a server or six dedicated to the Eye's core system operations and admin duties, but they aren't talked about. I suspect the argonauts are providing the core hardware here, though I could be wrong. The servers are probably hosted rimward with mirrors sunward.

All network traffic on the Eye is, of course, encrypted—it's effectively a world-class VPN. Traffic is also run through a sophisticated onion-router system, meaning that the source mesh ID is always masked.

SECURITY

The Eye uses a modified BLP (Bell–LaPadula) security policy model for handling access control and classifying information. Anyone submitting data to the Eye (whether that's a user profile, forum post, private message, chat log, or wiki entry) can categorize data at whatever confidentiality level they want, but they can only read at or below their personal clearance level. Wiki functionality, server oversight, and active moderation help ensure that data is classified at the appropriate level. Classification and clearance levels are a combination of sensitivity (based on how damaging the info could be to Firewall and/or if released to the public), the agent's role (proxies have a higher clearance than sentinels, and routers and vectors tend to have higher clearance than other proxies) and i-rep, and the relevant theater of operation. That file you want, for example, may only be accessible to experienced routers with high-level clearance and a respectable rep score, and even then only if it's relevant to their location and ongoing missions. Likewise, if you're uploading a report on a new threat, you can decide to make it accessible to just one person, the entire server, the top clearance people within Firewall, or slice it up any way in between.

Security clearances are one of the few other situations where hierarchy thrives within Firewall. Potential abuses are mitigated by rep hits and collective accountability. Proxies all have a basic clearance higher than sentinels, and the way they get upgraded is by having any five proxies with that higher clearance grant it to them. If a proxy rotates into a new server, for example, once that new server is satisfied they're a good fit and trustworthy, they'll vote to upgrade that new proxy's clearance so that they can pull their weight on their server's specific projects. This same security policy model also allows agents to share limited data with others who do not yet have the proper clearance by labeling them as *trusted*. This is the usual state of affairs for sentinels, who are trusted to receive the data they need to know to get an op done but lack the clearance for anything more.

Every new agent is given a private key when they are inducted into Firewall. This private key is how they access their account on the Eye and is intrinsically linked to their i-rep and clearance level. No other ID is tied to the account, though many agents set up additional authentication factors (such as a brainscan).

SOCIAL NETWORK

The Eye's social network functions like most others. Though profiles are anonymized by default, many proxies use their primary cover ID or other pseudonyms. Users can ping and ding each other's rep scores, send messages, post comments, and so on. This is also the medium used for seeking assistance outside of your server. If your server is tapped on credit, favors, intel, or resources, put out an open call for help on the assistance channels. If your mission takes you outside of your normal operational range, and you suddenly find yourself scrambling for a new morph or to borrow a shuttle, the Eye can be a lifesaver—assuming you have the i-rep to back your requests up.

The network provides access to a number of public and private newsfeeds, including channels maintained by servers that post news of relevance to Firewall. The Eye also features a vibrant social forum, where sentinels and proxies discuss everything from weapon specs and politics to gatecrashing rumors and new exsurgent threats. Keeping in line with Firewall's mission, the forums, chat rooms, and EyeWiki provide a place for proxies to share data with other servers. This includes channels for collaborating on cross-server projects and recruiting sentinels from other servers.

The EyeWiki is a great resource for documents and research of all kinds, from referendum-vetted Firewall policies and SOP manuals for handling different types of threats to the latest open reports posted by various scanners and crows.

RUMORS AND POSSIBILITIES

There's one area I recommend keeping an eye on: a section called *Rumors and Possibilities (R&P)*. Look at it and post in it. This is where a sentinel who notices something odd but not necessarily dangerous reports it. If a group of people are behaving oddly, you might have found evidence of a new criminal gang or the latest cult, or you might be seeing the first signs of a new strain of exsurgent virus starting to take them over. Sure, the first two options are far more likely than the third, but the chance to detect a threat before ravening contagious monsters come to eat your brain makes investigating even low-priority issues worthwhile. Just keep in mind that R&P is filled with reports that are incorrect, misleading, or outright false, and avoid the temptation to find

EYE INTRUSIONS

Start Æther Jabber
Active Members: 3

Vector 1: I just don't get it. Someone needs to explain to me how this network stays secure. All it takes is one sentinel to get nabbed and mind-raped, then their headware and account are compromised. Bam, intruders in our network. Sure, they'd be limited in what they could access by that person's clearance, but if they're careful, they could leverage that entry point to higher privileges within the system. This has to have happened dozens of times already.

Vector 2: It has. We've had verified incidents of compromised accounts. To our knowledge, none have lasted long.

Vector 1: How can you know? What about the incidents that we don't know about yet? I think you're projecting too much confidence in the Eye's infosec vectors.

Vector 2: Look, you're relatively new here. You haven't seen them in action yet. When you do, you'll be suitably impressed.

Vector 3: Let me put it this way. Last year, out of the blue, everyone in my server was informed that our register's account had been compromised. Turns out he'd gotten a bit too cozy with a few Titanian Fleet Intel players, and they'd arranged a forknapping without his knowledge. They grilled the fork, got info on his account and habits, and used that to piggyback on his Eye access and make some queries when he was distracted. Somehow, through some impressively intuitive monitoring magic, Eye security picked up on discrepancies in his traffic and activity. They took a closer look, engaged some network analysis and traces, and figured everything out. They shut out the intruders, reset his credentials, and there were some rumors about an unfortunate accident at a Titanian server farm later that week. His account was compromised for less than 24 hours.

Vector 2: Some intrusions are inevitable. That's why we compartmentalize, work to limit the damage, and design everything to fail closed.

Vector 1: Will that ever be enough? All it takes is one media outfit gaining access to the Eye to blow us wide open. We are in an age of transparency, it's open season on secrets.

Vector 2: That's why we have filters ready with plans in place to run damage control and spin operations. Not everything can be kept secret, but it can be mutated to something beyond recognition.

Vector 1: I'm glad you have so much faith in our team, but I don't think you're really keeping all of the possibilities in mind here. There are many, many ways we could be compromised—and probably already are, without even knowing it. Our opposition can throw some impressive weight our way. Let's say they become aware of some of our operatives, a small server or sentinel cell. They could throw enough assets at the problem to monitor all of their traffic, map out and identify our nodes, and crack the encryption on our channels, couldn't they?

Vector 2: The entire Eye network is handled via onion routers, many of which are meshed with other public onion nets. Traffic analysis will get them nowhere. They'd have to poison a significant amount of the network routers to get anything useful, and that's next to impossible because we switch new routers in and out all the time.

Vector 3: Also, have you looked at the encryption we use? I have. I know a thing or two about crypto, and we use some of the best stuff I've ever seen—easily several steps beyond what I've seen used by even Oversight or the Jovians. I'm not sure who we have on our team, but they're cryptography geniuses. We're a hardened target, even against quantum codebreakers.

Vector 1: Look, maybe they're good. Really good. But no one is perfect. Every system has weaknesses. You can't predict or protect against 0-day exploits. Our vectors may be kickass, they may be the best in the system, but they're not gods.

Vector 2: Some of them might be.

Vector 1: What are you saying?

Vector 2: Look, a long time ago, I came to the same conclusions as you. I thought we were doomed. Over the past few years, however, I've seen the Eye protect itself in ways I wouldn't have believed possible. Our network intrusion countermeasures are predictive, fast, and more solid than any defense has a right to be. So, yes, whatever is behind the scenes, overseeing our network, really is that good.

Vector 1: I find that extremely troublesome.

Vector 2: So did I, but I'm a pragmatist. I'll trust that whoever set it up knew what they were doing and what risks they were taking. So far, it's worked in our favor. Extremely effectively in our favor, in fact. I doubt we'd still be here if we didn't have it.

Vector 1: But … that means …

Vector 2: Yeah, it probably does. My policy? Don't ask, don't tell. ☘

patterns or monsters where none exist. A report of a group of people acting oddly insular and speaking in an unknown language in the same habitat you're tracking down a new hive of the stormist cult may be a solid lead … or it may be a red herring. That said, remember that we're not just about stopping exsurgents; transhumanity is perfectly capable of pursuing creepy and dangerous things on its own, and the worst of these can become our problem. The spread of a new cult or even a new fad can provide valuable clues to trends going on in the solar system. All sorts of proxies and sentinels post here, and a number of scanners sift through the posts looking for correlations. Even a short post can be useful for our data miners and might give someone a heads up about a problem that won't become an x-risk for a year or two.

THE SAFE ZONE

The *Safe Zone* is the place for anything-goes, off-topic material. Some operatives view this whole channel as a security risk and avoid it like the plague, but I recommend giving it a shot. Sure, there are sentinels bragging about their exploits in an XP game or how many intoxicants they managed to indulge in recently, but there's more than that going on. Other Firewall agents can be a valuable resource even for our abnormal lives. You might hear about a job opportunity or get useful advice about a relationship problem. It's a great place to blow off steam in the presence of others who understand all too well some of what you've been through. There's a wealth of bad advice along with the good, of course, but just being able to chat with people who grok your experiences is often enough.

There's also a far more practical and immediate reason to cultivate at least some social presence on the Eye. Some of you prefer to work alone, but most of us are part of small teams, and finding a good team is essential. Proxies like myself aren't here to hold your hand and find you colleagues with whom you can work—that's up to you, and this is the place to do it. You might be looking for a new team or you might be part of a team that needs more members; either way, the *Safe Zone* is where you can talk about this and also where other sentinels can at least get some hint of who you are and if they could work with you.

Server Rep

It's worth noting that individual servers also have their own rep scores. This is one of the way servers keep tabs on each other. Proxies that use and abuse their sentinels or hoard useful intel tend to find that other servers won't play as nicely with them. Server rep scores are an invaluable resource for sentinels and proxies working with new servers, seeking to get a lay of the land.

Factions/Cliques

Posted By: Voodoo Doll <Info Msg Rep>

There's a document that's been making its way around the server for the past couple of days detailing our relationship with outside groups. It's an interesting read, but there's more to this story than just Us and Them. There's Us, Them, The Other Us, Those Two Guys Down The Road, and the Fuckup in the Corner. Firewall may present a nice, united front, but the truth is we're a bickering and opinionated cluster of people only barely held together by concern over the bright, metallic sword named Extinction that's hanging over our necks. Which means if you're on a mission, you want to know who's standing at your back as much as who you're dealing with, cause it'll change the approach you can take.

While it's tempting to think of the various cliques as sub-organizations within Firewall, that's inaccurate. These are more like schools of thoughts, philosophies, or political camps. It's not like there's formal rank within the groups.

The first thing to remember when it comes to most servers is that, like ours, you'll find a mix of camps. There are a few out there that have opted for the echo chamber of ideological purity, but most are a mix. It's handy to have other opinions, so long as we can all manage to get along long enough to get the work done. Of course, like any political camp, you'll find plenty of people who are a little of this and a little of that or prefer to not get involved at all. Whoever you're working with might not agree with any specific party line.

The First Schism

To really understand Firewall's factional divisions, you have to look back at how this crazy conspiracy came together. The roots of our internal divisions are buried deep within our complex history. For folks who weren't around in those early days, Firewall's origins are best described as convergent evolution. Multiple organizations came together on the same trajectory because we could all agree that no one wanted to see transhumanity exterminated. Simple as that. I trust this material's been covered in the briefings or you've at least skimmed the backstory on the Eye.

The fact that we had a common goal doesn't mean that any of us operated the same way or that we even agreed with each

others' methods for our mutually assured survival, of course. Almost from the beginning we had disagreements and major arguments, but there was too much to get done back then for us not to work together, not while we were fighting to survive. After everything settled down and we started planning for the long haul, however, is when we had our first problems.

In those early days, the messages, conferences, and face-to-face meetings were coming in fast. When we weren't sending sentinels out to shoot down the latest threat that popped up to eat us, we were hashing out how to handle things. One of the biggest concerns early on was with our AGI partners. In the prevailing public opinion of the time, anything AI-related was considered incredibly suspect, and a lot of that sentiment reverberated in our ranks. The AGIs in our ranks were undeniably helpful, many of them proving themselves again and again. Still, they raised concerns just by existing in our midst.

Once the suggestion was made to isolate AGIs from our conversations by the bloc that would later become known as the *conservatives* (something the AGIs have not forgotten since), things became heated. We were effectively discussing banning a class of sapients from our group, and opinions at both ends of the disagreement were strong. The horrors of the Fall were fresh, and many people who would normally side with AGIs were swayed by the "for our safety" arguments. At the same time, another debate was reaching criticality over how to handle technology captured from the TITANs. The faction soon to be known as the *pragmatists* argued that knowledge was power and some risks are worth taking. The conservatives used their momentum from the anti-AGI cause to win ground, however, pushing to protect ourselves by throwing everything we found from the TITANs into the sun.

As the friction escalated between the conservatives and pragmatists, another fight was brewing. A significant bloc within Firewall, soon to be known as the *backups,* were pushing hard to devote Firewall resources to their pet projects. With limited assets available, this initiated major disagreements over resource allocation with those concerned more with rescuing people and resisting the threats against us. So much of transhumanity was still in danger, crying out for rescue, that only those few of us thinking that far ahead could see any benefit in wasting our precious resources on their backup schemes. In the years since, the resistance has eased, but we've yet to see any immediate benefits from the backups' efforts, making this a perennial issue.

The *Sweet Dreams* Affair

A split within Firewall seemed imminent. Before we hit that breaking point, along came the *Sweet Dreams* disaster. *Sweet Dreams* was a small craft launched after the Exodus had mostly petered out—essentially just hard drives attached to a propulsion unit. It was full of uploaded egos that had been rescued by Conductor, an AGI. Their ship experienced a critical control issue with their navigation and fell into a decaying orbit. They asked for help and one of the prominent conservative servers answered the call. Unfortunately, they made some gross assumptions regarding the nature of the satellite and the trustworthiness of Conductor. When another Firewall team picked through the rubble afterwards, not a trace of TITAN influence was found. A rough estimate of data space at the time suggests upwards of a hundred and twenty thousand egos were in storage on the craft that was destroyed. The situation was further compounded when another server revealed that Conductor had previously worked with the Lifeboat Institute, and there was a significant chance that some Lifeboat staff had been on that satellite.

The backlash was intense. The pragmatists pushed through a referendum that vetted the inclusion of AGIs within Firewall's ranks. The backups used the calamity to pool sympathy support for Lifeboat projects that Firewall was considering continuing. The conservatives lost major ground. Most importantly, though the balance of power shifted, the organization stayed intact. Opposing viewpoints found cause to stay together. Our judgment as an organization became, thankfully, more nuanced. That almost certainly saved us from compounding one tragedy with another.

The main takeaway here is that the split wasn't over what to do but how to do it. We had just gotten our teeth kicked in. Some of us wanted to make sure there were redundancies in place for the next time. Some didn't particularly care what it cost us individually so long as most of us survived. And we had a whole mass of people in the "nuke it from orbit, it's the only way to be sure" camp. Everyone was scared and hurting, but they stuck together. These three mind-sets continue to duel it out ideologically to this day. While the balance of power often shifts, the pragmatists continue to have the upper hand with setting policy, the backups continue to get a significant chunk of our resources, and the conservatives continue to get their way when situations get really bad.

Things got said and there's people you may run across on missions that still remember that. So try to figure out who you're talking to before you go running your mouth on any of this.

Backups

Memes: Exploration, Nano-Ecology, Research, Resilient Systems, Survival

The backup clique is all about resilience and redundant systems. These are the folks with contingency plans for everything. In their view, once something like the Fall happens, it's not a matter of if it'll happen again, but when. Our job is to keep kicking that can down the road as long as possible. These guys just assume that eventually we're going to trip and then we'll need to be able to pick up at the last save point. Their logic can't really be denied. So long as they don't eat up too many of our reserves planning for what *might* happen that we end up missing what

is happening, I'm content to let them keep at it. If it turns out they're right, we'll be grateful they saved as much as they did.

If you ever get in deep on any of the main backup servers, you'll notice a lot of names from the old Lifeboat NGO and the Institute for a Transhuman Future. They were some of the top experts when it came to disaster recovery, so post-disaster they stuck with what they knew. They had a number of ongoing projects that Firewall managed to salvage. It's not all Lifeboat, though, and that's pretty important to remember. A good slice of the Singularity Foundation was also in this camp, including plenty of their AGIs (and if this is still an issue for you, you should probably get over it). The backups are also heavily populated by argonauts, specifically environmental, biological, and memetic researchers.

For the most part, backups stay out of the way of the other groups. Frankly, I'm glad for that, as we have enough meddling and infighting as it is between the pragmatists and the conservatives. If you want a good crow for a project, turn to the backups. The majority of their research wing is dedicated to projects that may pay off big in case of a catastrophe. A lot of their members are high-rep or high-cred or both. Research and invention keeps their books in the black, so I'd guess they probably have a sizable dark budget for the projects they're not sharing with any other servers except when absolutely necessary.

Need to impress them? Walk in with research in hand. It'll at least get you in the door. Even the inner system backups adhere to reputation systems. They care about what you can do and what you've done a lot more than they care about how polite you are when you come calling. Be warned, there is a bit of the old academic tenure mindset in play. Expect to have to show a track record and be considerate of the seniority of their members, especially if you're new to this organization.

As strong as their research wing is, you shouldn't be surprised when I tell you they have a very strong presence in the outer system, specifically with the argonauts and Titanians. Surprisingly, they also have strong ties with the ultimates, though in my experience that's more about sharing in the advances than any philosophical alliance. They like to talk shop.

If you're going out-of-system, the backups are the faction you want to talk to. They jumped on the interests controlling the Pandora gates early on and still have some of the best contacts in those sectors that I've seen. These include anarchist collectives running missions through the Fissure Gate, hypercorps sponsoring ops through the Martian Gate, and various interests involved with Pandora Gate ins-and-outs.

Given how many helpful arrangements I've seen out of the Vulcanoid Gate, I'm convinced the backups have some serious ties within TerraGenesis workers' councils. If strings need pulling, they get pulled. As interested as the backups are in redundancy, they're probably a significant force behind the TerraGenesis focus on terraforming. The more transhumanity is spread out, the harder we become to kill. Like roaches. When the Vulcanoid Gate was attacked a few years back, that gave me nightmares. I'm still worried that Ozma's clued in on our connections there or maybe some hypercorp just made a lucky guess. It's a cold case now, so I doubt we'll know for sure until whoever it is makes a second attempt.

If you find yourself in their way, don't let them know that until you've found an alternate way home or expect to lose the fork. No one likes getting sliced and diced during a "gate accident," and that's assuming you don't just get "misplaced" along the way. Access to that gate is a resource we want to protect, and they're easier to work with than most, so please stay on their good side—it makes my job easier.

If you're going gatecrashing, an easy way to earn favor with the backups is to offer to help one of them out with a side project. They can probably assist you with information and maybe even equipment if you really need it. Just don't ask too many questions about what's in the little black box they ask you to bury in a remote location along the way. I know the backups have sent at least a dozen of these black boxes out on gatecrashing missions in the last few months. I haven't had a chance to really look

EYEWIKI: OPERATION CUCKOO

Classification: TOP SECRET / MOLD BROOD EYES ONLY

The cuckoo is a type of bird that leaves its eggs in the nests of other birds. Operation CUCKOO is actively seeking the means to host a transhuman ego in a Factor morph in hopes of quietly securing a foothold for transhumanity in Factor space. The goal behind this project is to insert a cabal of transhuman egos within Factor society, in which it can blend and use as cover, in order to secure a future for transhumanity should the rest of our own species be wiped out. Though this project has been called a chilling judgment of transhuman nature, there is an evolutionary basis for this initiative in the form of brood parasites on Earth, as well as a historical basis given the Factors' alleged survival of their own singularity event and cautious nature towards x-risk technology.

Operation CUCKOO work is considered far too sensitive to perform close to home. The backups have secured a facility on an exoplanet named Petrus, accessed via the Portal Gate. With the shredded remains of a Factor recovered during a gatecrashing mission, they've made some progress in attempting to create a Factor-based morph capable of supporting transhuman life. Unfortunately, the neurology of the creatures remains difficult to decipher without a living example to study in order to model behavior.

Obtaining a live sample would advance the project considerably, though it may risk a direct conflict with transhumanity's closest neighbors.

one over, but I've heard they're inscrutable—locked down tight. Whatever it is, it doesn't run on much juice. Once buried, they're hard to pick up on a scan. They seem to be connected to something called Operation KUDZU, but I don't have the clearance to get anything more than that.

Prominent Backup Servers

Alchemy server is heavy influence and populated by argonauts. They are self-funded through their own projects and heavily invested in the preservation of the knowledge and genetics of transhumanity. Their primary endeavor has been to establish a series of genetic and information archive vaults in secure locations. These seed vaults are designed to withstand worst-case scenarios.

Blattella server is not well known outside of backup circles. They try to stay well below the radar of everyone, including most of Firewall. This server is runs Operation KUDZU. They are well versed in using other backups as a cover for their operations.

Little Greenie server includes some top experts in the fields of xenobiology, xeno-ecology, and exoplanetary sciences. Their focus is figuring out transhumanity's best survival strategies for populating extrasolar worlds. This also means they deal with everything from exo-threats and first-contact scenarios to exoplanet survival caches and creating morphs from alien life. They have extensive ties among various gatecrashing projects and run at least one front company—Dakao Extrasolar—through which they sponsor gate ops.

Conservatives

Memes: Isolationism, Security, Survival

The conservatives are known for their precautionist, security-oriented roots. They don't really subscribe to the notion of grey areas; if it's a potential threat, it needs to be down—with prejudice. From their POV, they're the ones willing to draw the necessary lines, make the grim-faced calls, stamp out the threats, and ensure our safety and future. They think everyone else is reckless, unfocused, soft-hearted, and likely to get us all killed. To the rest of us, the conservatives are xenophobic, paranoid, and trigger-happy. On the positive side, they keep the rest of us on our toes.

The conservatives have always been a strong influence within Firewall, and in the early days they held the reins. A lot of their people came from the JASONs and the military and spy people we pulled in, including a number of hackers that previously belonged to three-letter agencies. They were a major force in establishing Firewall's clandestine cell structure and guerrilla tactics, and quite a few brought their direct experience from countering the TITANs to the table. It should be no surprise that most of the biocons and Jovians we recruit end up siding with this lot, though the conservatives as a rule don't take issues with resleeving or nanotech.

Heavy Traffic

To: <encrypted>
From: <encrypted>

So what's the deal with all of these priority requests from Alchemy? They keep submitting requests for what adds up to a truly massive amount of processing power. Every time they do, they expect us to drop what we're doing and answer the call. I don't know what it is they have over there, but it's Priority One every time it crosses my feed. Makes me nervous. ☘

It's a mistake to pigeon-hole the conservatives as one-dimensional. A number of precautionist argonauts inhabit their forums, and there's also a particularly vocal segment of former Singularity Foundation programmers with a we-are-terrified-of-what-we-created-and-will-create-again perspective. Mix them all together and throw in a solid number of reclaimers and folks who simply lost one person too many during the Fall or witnessed things they can't unsee, and you've got the doomsday-is-nigh, all-bets-are-off mindset that is central to conservative ideology.

Conservatives fill proxy roles across the spectrum, but are particularly weighted towards router, eraser, register, and filter roles. Inner system types are more heavily represented, of course—quite a few conservatives don't gel very well with autonomist outlooks.

The conservative-pragmatist fight may well be the longest-running argument in Firewall, with no signs of easing up. I put even odds on it being the driving force that will eventually split Firewall apart. So far the conservatives have lost the vote on a slew of major issues—in particular whether or not to treat AGIs, asyncs, the Pandora gates, and the Factors as serious x-risks. To their credit, they've stuck with the group decision and played along (minus a few rogue servers). I like to think the wiser heads realize the importance of maintaining a united front. It can't be denied that the conservatives still wield a heavily influence on Firewall policy. They make sure that even when we decide to gamble on risks, we're still prepared and protected. If that means having an anti-matter warhead ready to go, so be it.

The conservatives also have a major tiff going with the structuralists. They are very much opposed to the idea of going public. They dislike the idea of losing the edge that spycraft gives us among the traditional economies and hypercorps of the inner system, not to mention the loss of power that goes along with being legit. I think it's fair to say that they also fear the creation of another secret society or the growth of Ozma if Firewall loses its extralegal ecological niche.

Resource-wise, the conservatives have the best ties to various corporate, government, and military outfits throughout the system. They're certainly the most free to operate within Jovian space. There's

occasional tension between the inner system conservatives and their Jovian compatriots, but for the most part the Jovians don't drink the Junta's special flavor of punch. The conservatives also have the most in-roads with arms dealers and weapon research projects—partly to keep an eye on them, partly to keep Firewall well supplied.

Prominent Conservative Servers

The **Arrow of Paris server** is one of the conservatives' main research projects. Staffed by robotocists, engineers, nano-programmers, medical doctors, and weapons designers, they seek out the best way to destroy, subvert, kill, and otherwise disable exsurgents and TITAN machines. Their investigations have pinpointed valuable vulnerabilities in TITAN designs. Many of their discoveries are covertly seeded to outside groups, under the philosophy that all of transhumanity should be using the best weapons at our disposal. There's a good chance they're keeping a few exploits back, just in case things really get hairy.

Crematoria server is tasked with monitoring Earth and the ongoing interdiction. They try and keep track of everything going in and out, including mapping the interdiction network's capabilities. They've been instrumental in helping to contain a few outbreaks as well as scrappers trying to sell some things they shouldn't be touching. Though they're very strict about parceling out info, they can be a crucial resource for any Firewall team that needs to get to Earth.

Ozymandias server handles the big nightmare apocalypse picture. They run simulations on TITAN attacks, alien invasions, and other top-level threats, then put contingency plans in place to stop them. Part of me doesn't want to think about what kind of hardware they're stealing, designing, and stockpiling—I just hope it works if we ever need to use it.

Pragmatists

Memes: Research, Survival, Techno-Progressivism

Pragmatists are the biggest camp in Firewall. In my experience, many of them feel justified in taking the risk (and paying the price) of using anything we have on hand against the threats we face. In order to fight a superior enemy, they argue, we have to do what we can to even the odds. Not everyone agrees with this assessment. Though the pragmatists claim to only take carefully measured and reasonable risks, the cost-benefit ratios at stake are open to dispute. So far, pragmatist policies are netting us a distinctly positive gain, but something is bound to backfire eventually.

The pragmatists formed early on as a counterpoint to the conservatives. Their positions tended to be grounded in scientific consensus and rational, boolean-logic-based risk assessment—something at which human brains are admittedly quite poor. Rationality and fear have been going at it for centuries, however, and rationality usually loses. The pragmatists managed to pull the credibility they gained with the early dispute over AGIs in Firewall into significant policy leverage, and they've managed to maintain it—sometimes just barely—ever since. It helps that they actually listen to the conservatives' concerns and take appropriate precautions (though usually not as stringently as the conservatives would like) and also divert enough resources to keep the backups occupied (if not entirely grumble-free). The string of bodies and near misses that sometimes accompany their operations, however, raises red flags for the more wary. If you've ever been face-to-face with an exsurgent, the urge to treat a pragmatist as if they were nearly as dangerous is understandable.

The pragmatists pull their support from all over Firewall's base. They have a particularly strong contingent of ex-JASON and argonauts who felt their warnings leading up to the events of the Fall had been ignored. They've managed to draw several former conservatives over—the pragmatist focus on results can be liberating for those frustrated by previous restrictions. You'll find pragmatists throughout the system, but their more active resources are rimward. Given their support to AGI and async causes, both are well represented in their ranks, alongside a heavy dose of autonomists and argonauts.

Pragmatists have some of the most extensive scanner networks throughout the system. They've brought discreet observation to a fine art, nearly precognitive. It fits with their strategy: the best way to avoid a problem is to stop it before it ever develops into one. Of course, that also means they're able to get to—and lay claim to—advanced, alien, or TITAN technology before anyone else can. There are rumors—unsubstantiated, of course—that they keep secret caches of unknown technology. That's always made me a little nervous; it seems like a cycle that could feed on itself. An ongoing concern held by others is that the pragmatists may push us into relying on something we don't fully understand. Who's to say the pragmatists aren't doing this in secret already? They certainly have the budget to be running black labs, out of the sight of the rest of Firewall. I can only hope they're smart enough to isolate their more

RIZQ

Many pragmatists embrace the ethos called *rizq*. Rizq (RREE-zukh) means "sustenance," "livelihood," or even "blessing" in Arabic, but it's also the root of the French "risqué", whence the English "risk." Among pragmatists, rizq refers to risky exploration for the advancement of knowledge. Discussion of rizq on a mission or operation encompasses several factors: risk to the team, risk to Firewall, threat to the rest of transhumanity, and value of the knowledge to be gained. Several sub-forums on the Eye are dedicated to philosophizing about, modeling, and practically applying rizq to decision-making. ■

UNCANNY SUCCESS

Start Æther Jabber
Active Members: 2

- Well, the pragmatists seem to have been right again with this [REDACTED] situation. I'm not sure how they pulled it off. I thought for sure their decision was going to backfire. I had my popcorn ready.
- Indeed, they have an uncanny ability, practically inconceivable, to pull victory from the event horizon of defeat.
- If I believed in deities …
- What about artificial ones?
- What are you saying?
- I've been thinking about their luck for … well, let's just say a long time. Remember back in the early days? The incident with Conductor and *Sweet Dreams*? How it threw everything into disarray and gave the pragmatists the edge they needed to pull ahead? Well, looking back, I can't help but think of how neat it all was. A nice little incident, perfectly packaged, got both the pragmatists and the backups what they wanted.
- You're saying it was staged? Do you have evidence?
- Of course not. They're too smart for that. Consider this idle speculation. But give it some thought, and think about how some of the other conflicts have played out over the past decade. It's almost as if the pragmatists have a guardian angel. Or several.
- You're talking about the ones we've talked about before. The ones who might have gotten away. We never found anything conclusive.
- Yes, but the signs were there. The bandwidth records. The way the TITANs were flat out foiled in some of their assaults on the orbitals—and not by us. The way some of their own machines turned against them. The events in Barcelona. The way some of our own people seemed to have inside knowledge of some of these affairs, that they weren't sharing.
- OK, I can see what you're thinking. But what's the backup angle? Why did they benefit from the *Sweet Dreams* affair?
- Well, if you were on the losing side of a war, you'd need to go to ground, yes? Hide out. Lay low. And you'd need processing capability. Bandwidth. Redundant connections. Well, what did the backups walk away with?
- Shit. Resources. That actually makes sense.
- It does. And it worries me.

experimental projects from the rest of us and that they have plans for how to sterilize the labs if something goes wrong.

To their credit, the pragmatists do seem to take risk mitigation seriously. Even they draw the line at some things and will have fail-safe plans ready if things go wrong. While asyncs might be nominally accepted within Firewall due to the pragmatists' influence, for example, you can be damn sure there are measures in place to keep an eye on them and deal with them should they all turn out to be some sort of exsurgent sleeper infestation. The same is hopefully true of research into xenotech, TITAN relics, and so on. It's only rational, after all.

PROMINENT PRAGMATIST SERVERS

BT-33 server is a new server operating under a temporary designation. If they don't pick a formal name soon, I'm pretty sure they're going to get dubbed "the Bee-Tees." BT-33 is almost entirely composed of pragmatists recently booted from other servers after political struggles with the conservatives. A few of them have (at least based on the rumors I've heard) async talents, and I wouldn't be surprised if they have more unorthodox talent on tap. Their i-rep is in the tank at the moment but they seem like they want to do good, so BT-33 will take on just about any job they can to get back in good graces.

Lima-Advance server is a spin-off of the much larger Lima Server. They focus their attention on aftermath reports, both their own and any reports sent to them by other servers for analysis. They promise a full root-cause analysis of what went wrong on any particular mission along with a graded selection of solutions to detected problems. If you can trust them to keep your dirty laundry safe, they'll tell you how to clean it.

Sage server is one of the better known scanner-focused servers. Most of their work seems to be focused sunward, in particular the political manipulations of the Consortium and the hypercorps. Occasionally they will pick up on a trend elsewhere, if only because they seem to be able to tap into the resources of the groups they're watching to construct a larger pattern. If Sage throws an alert, it's always worth looking into.

Toy Soldiers Server is a fun server to work with. They're closely tied with the Toybox, so they get the fun and, frankly, dangerous goodies to work with. They're aware of the risks and so regularly rotate their proxies around to minimize exposure to dangerous influences. Even if you don't particularly like playing with dangerous objects, a stint with Toy Soldiers can be very good training in how to handle dangerous objects with the longest pair of tongs possible.

THE SECOND SCHISM

Now that you're up to speed on the three cliques that formed immediately post-Fall, there are two more you need to know about. Around AF 6, when we really started making some traction on our work as a whole, there was a recruitment push. We picked up a lot of good talent, but faster than we probably should have. We just weren't ready for the change that came with it. When you're there from the beginning with an organization, it's a very different thing than if you're brought in later. It's unintentional, but the urge to yell at all

the kids on your lawn is there. A lot of the newcomers bristled at the bureaucracy and orthodox ways the old guard was setting down as law.

Around this time, there was a mission to Saturn's moon Hyperion trying to track down an anomalous signal picked up by the Sage server. The mission went bad—details are still sketchy. None of our sentinels made use of their emergency farcasters before their deaths so we don't have nearly enough information to know exactly what happened. What our second team was able to find, though, pointed towards an abusive proxy and some pretty blatant memory editing. The political fallout aggravated a problem we didn't know we had, like it was custom built to blow us apart. That's always struck me as odd, but I've not been able to convince anyone to dig into it deeper. It's just too sore a subject.

I know we're all pretty sensitive to consolidations of power and hierarchical structures. I get that. The reason I post as openly as I do on this forum is because I want you to know that I will tell you as much as I can without risking our missions. I hope I've earned your trust—because trust is what the second split was about, in my opinion. The first generation of Firewall didn't trust the younger crowd to know how to do the job. And the younger didn't trust us to treat them as anything but expendable.

A lot of the newer recruits began challenging the way we did things, even going so far as to question some of Firewall's foundational roots. A not-insignificant portion of the old guard also jumped in on the criticism session, airing various grievances that they'd been harboring for years. The conservatives used the situation to fling mud at the pragmatists and undermine their dominance. For months, arguments flared, the Eye seethed, and Firewall wrestled more with internal drama than x-threats.

The Death Leopard Affair

Right as another split seemed imminent, a new but prominent server called Death Leopard was outed as being an Ozma operation. Though relatively new, the server was composed of old-guard proxies from the established cliques as well as newer generation proxies—all of whom had played key roles in instigating divisive ideological arguments. The revelation shocked Firewall to its core and brought the fiery rhetoric to a standstill. Though the conspiracy had outed infiltrators before, this was the deepest and most invasive penetration so far. With clear evidence that Ozma had been fueling the infighting with infiltrators in both the new recruits and old guard, all of the parties involved took the opportunity to step back and self-reflect.

When the dust settled, the arguments continued, but in a more constructive and respectful manner. The backups, conservatives, and pragmatists all loosened up a bit and even modified some of Firewall's methods and SOPs. Two new factions formed as well, championing new takes on the Firewall agenda.

Mavericks

Memes: Iconoclasm, Individualism, Nihilism

The mavericks are less of an organized faction and more a motley collection of malcontents. They are known as cowboys, rule-breakers, and dissidents, bucking Firewall's usual methods and collective style and taking a more individualistic—and often risky—approach to their missions.

The mavericks include a lot of agents who were burned on previous missions or by rival factions. They still believe in Firewall's purpose, but they hold deep and lasting grudges against certain proxies, cliques, and/or the way Firewall handles things. This faction is also populated by people who can only be described as nihilists. These tend to thoroughly believe that Firewall is fucked and transhumanity is doomed, but they at least hope to take as many of our opponents as they can down with us. The other significant population of mavericks are individuals who feel marginalized and without a voice. These include mercurials, poorly socialized AGIs, people with religious beliefs, a few bioconservatives, singularity seekers, and ultimates, and a few others that are simply weird and don't fit in.

As expected, quite a few mavericks simply don't play well with others. These have either formed their own chaotic servers or operate on the fringe of existing servers. Most mavericks tend to at least provide lip service to Firewall's procedures, settling uncomfortably into servers where they provide oppositional viewpoints and occasionally or frequently buck the system. Naturally, mavericks tend to rub other Firewall agents the wrong way. They're too anti-authoritarian for the inner-system types and too individualistic for autonomist sensibilities. They most commonly take on vector, filter, and eraser roles, though the majority prefer to stay on the outskirts and work as sentinels. Extropians, ultimates, scum, mercurials, and even a few hyperelite socialites are well represented in their ranks.

Despite the trouble they cause, the mavericks are valuable to Firewall. They shake the foundations and keep the organization from becoming too sedimentary and stuck in its ways. They bring fresh insights, think outside the box, invent, and improvise. They break deadlocks, lead the charge, and provide us with some worthwhile martyrs. Though often infuriating to work with, they can be just as entertaining with their grandiose rants and drop-the-mic stunts.

Prominent Maverick Servers

Arioch server is the most noteworthy ongoing and steady maverick server. Founded by a group of scum, this server operates as the crew of the ship *Don't Feed the Wormhole*. The focus of this server is best described as: whatever the fuck they currently feel like. They've ranged far and wide across the solar system, effectively pursuing their own random agenda, which so far has included smoking out an exhuman cell in the Neptunian Trojans, blowing the whistle on a

hypercorp nanoplague project in Venusian orbit, and tracking down a stolen alien artifact on Luna.

The **Four Horsemen** are a mini-server of erasers that operate in the Saturnian system. They make themselves available to other servers in the region as needed. They are known for bringing an excessive amount of firepower corresponding with an equal lack of discretion to the situation, so caution is urged when calling them in.

Ghost server is a disparate server of mercurial-minded AGIs, most of them uplifted from emergent software systems. They work as deep research scanners, delving into massive and arcane data sets and uncovering exquisite gems of knowledge.

STRUCTURALISTS

Memes: Hierarchy, Legitimacy, Stability

The structuralist camp represents two distinct positions within Firewall. The first encourages Firewall to develop a stronger, more centralized internal structure. In large part this is a reaction to Firewall's heavy autonomist influence, which is viewed as too disorganized and chaotic. The structuralists see hierarchy as a stepping stone to efficiency and a better model for protecting against infiltration and external subversion. The second position advocated by structuralists is to take Firewall public, to seek out status as a legitimate, above-ground organization. They argue that Firewall cannot be truly effective so long as it remains illegal and underground, with limited resources. The issue of how exactly Firewall would legitimize itself and which governments it would work with remains an open and disputed question.

Structuralist positions are quite controversial, and the faction remains relatively small. The clique counts many inner system, hypercorp, hyperelite, ultimate, and Jovian agents as members. Surprisingly, the Titanians are also well represented, as they see a distinct opportunity to connect Firewall with some of their existing government agencies. Structuralists lean towards register, filter, and router positions. The primary resources they wield as a faction are ties to various hypercorps and microcorps.

The structuralists clash with the mavericks even more than they do with the conservatives and pragmatists. Though both cliques were born out of the same disputes, they could not be more opposite in their agendas. There is some concern among other factions that some structuralists may go rogue and blow the whistle on Firewall, effectively outing the organization. For this reason the most vocal go-public structuralists are kept under close watch. More than one forum poster has idly speculated that the structuralists would be a perfect front for Ozma, designed to drive a wedge into Firewall and force it into the open, leaving Ozma in a much better position to maneuver. This kind of talk enrages the structuralists, of course—no one likes being called a traitor.

Prominent Structuralist Servers

Executive server operates system-wide, but with a strong focus sunward. They primarily investigate hypercorp and oligarch conflicts, seeking to deter anything that could spill out into a system-wide fight and keeping an eye out for anything indicative of illicit research or other x-risks. They have also adopted a hierarchical internal structure, though theirs is based on a corporate board. There are some concerns that this server has become a pawn in an ongoing oligarch dispute.

Rishi server operates on Luna and in Earth orbit with a very rigid internal structure, led by a duo of elected routers. Their particular specialty is rooting out both dormant and active exsurgent pockets in their region.

Minor Factions

While the backups, conservatives, mavericks, pragmatists, and structuralists represent the five largest ideological blocs within Firewall, there are many smaller ones that wield varying amounts of influence. Most of these represent the extremist fringe of the main cliques, but others bring new—and usually, esoteric—ideas to the table.

Anti-Capitalists

Given the strong autonomist influence within Firewall, it should come as no surprise that radical anti-capitalist views are widespread. This faction argues that hypercapitalism itself, particularly as exercised by the Planetary Consortium and inner system polities (and also the Jovians), is an x-threat. They argue that capitalism's reliance on perpetual growth and inherent inequalities and oppressiveness will only lead to war and future disaster. They point to capitalism's lack of response to the climate crisis on Earth as a historical example, and also point to the immense power and influence wielded by oligarchs without any sort of democratic oversight. Though small, this faction is vocal and gaining support. So far they constrain themselves to monitoring the hypercapitalists for signs of military aggression and keep quiet tabs on oligarch dealings. According to rumors, some anti-capitalist proxies are providing material support to CRAM, the Barsoomians, and other autonomist subversives within the inner system.

Aggressive Reclaimers

A vocal contingent of reclaimers within Firewall contends that the best defense is a good offense—especially if that offense is an antimatter bomb. They argue for nothing less than wiping out all known TITAN/exsurgent pockets with devastating strikes, including those on Earth, and then launching an all-out assault to reclaim our homeworld. Such a campaign would require collaboration with existing military and governmental powers, and the reclaimers have had a measure of success recently in getting structuralists to nominally support this plan. They do not restrict their aggression to TITAN targets, either—they believe exhuman outposts and other threats should be eliminated whenever they are discovered with precision strikes.

Capsulists

The capsulists are a fringe wing of the backups that argue that the current epoch is simply too dangerous for transhumanity. They theorize that the best way to survive is to load as many egos as we can into processor loci and hide them away into numerous out-of-the-way locations. They speculate that such hidden, low-signature hideouts could escape the notice of the TITANs and other threats for millennia. Meanwhile, our infomorph societies could run at accelerated speeds, progressively and incrementally raise our intelligence and capabilities, and eventually emerge much smarter and more prepared to handle any threats. So far they have managed to get several active processor loci installed in some of the vaults established with Operation FORCED RETIREMENT.

Mindcrafters

This faction, populated by several cast-offs from the old Singularity Foundation and Machine Intelligence Directorate, believe that the only way to contend with a super-intelligent threat is with an equal or greater super-intelligence. To that end, they argue that continuing the old SF and MIND projects to create friendly ASI is key to our survival as species. In effect, they wish to create a group of benevolent god-like minds that can watch over and direct transhumanity's future, guiding us and protecting us from extinction. Not everyone is keen on the idea of robot overlords, however, no matter how friendly they are.

Untrusted Allies

Start Æther Jabber
Active Members: 2

Person A: Any luck so far?

Person B: Depends on what you mean. We've kept a core segment of negatists under tight scrutiny for over a month now. So far, there has been no indication they intend to break ranks, nor anything that signals an intention for them to work with outsiders. I don't think we can keep this level of surveillance up for long. A few of them are already getting suspicious.

Person A: Interesting. And nothing connecting them to that incident at the Vulcanoid Gate?

Person B: We went in depth into their histories, as much as we could reconstruct them. We found nothing suspicious.

Person A: So either they're good or we're being too paranoid.

Person B: In this game, there's no such thing as too paranoid.

Person A: OK. Pull back, but pick two of them to continue to monitor—go for the most radical. Watch them for another month before we decide to ease off to a more passive overwatch.

Person B: On it.

Negatists

Though this faction's name is derived from a pun, their intentions are serious. They advocate the destruction (or at least the quarantine, if this fails) of all known Pandora gates. In their view, the gates present an unparalleled risk, providing an invasion vector into numerous areas of our home system by the TITANs or a not-yet-known alien menace. They encourage extra-solar exploration at sublight speeds, which would give us the time to increase our technological base before we expand and encounter other existing threats.

Field Ops

Posted By: Factotum <Info Msg Rep>

First off, I would like to apologize on behalf of Firewall. I know that's small comfort in light of your situation, but a time-accelerated simulspace briefing is better than nothing. You do have eidetic memory, right? Your muse should be able to pull up relevant sections on a contextual basis during your mission. The schedule I've been given indicates that we have roughly 60 hours to go over field operations. It's best if we begin now. Complaining about your mission to me is unproductive and dangerous. I can't do anything to change your mission and we have a limited amount of time to work. Focus on the task at hand for now. It's easier to get payback at the sons-of-bitches who forced this on you after you build some rep in the Eye. You might change your mind after you complete your mission, though. Most sentinels come to understand why they are necessary after their first mission.

Please refer to me as Factotum if you have any questions. To anticipate your first few, yes, I am a carefully pruned beta fork of an anonymous Firewall operative. I am only sent out to brief new agents on missions. No, I don't have access to any information about your particular mission that you don't already have. As you will see later, it's better to treat information as a hazard that must be minimized.

We'll start at the beginning, looking at how ops are put together, and proceed from there.

The Watch: The Role of Scanners

If you look at your org chart and terminology index, you should already know the terms scanner and proxy. We know some of the sentinels with whom we work don't fully appreciate the role proxies play behind the scenes. We've heard them deride proxies for "staying in the rear with the gear." Granted, most of our resleevings come from erasure squads and sentinels in the field, but we do not measure importance through casualties metrics. Your operations would get nowhere without the support of the proxies behind them, and it all starts with the scanners.

By monitoring and analyzing every bit of data they can access, scanners form the core of our intelligence efforts. They detect and prevent as many existential threats as sentinels defuse or disrupt. This is done through a combination of surveillance and data mining to find actionable intelligence. When they find something, they're the ones who start the mission process. They propose a new op, the server votes on it, and a router takes it from there. This ability to kick things off means that scanners must retain a sense of objectivity in their work. New ops mean they may be responsible for sending Firewall personnel in harm's way. Failure to initiate an op may mean that innocents pay the price.

Sentinels often think that all scanners are infomorphs hooked into the mesh nonstop, processing every public and private feed in the system at once; our own private panopticon. Firewall does not believe in wasting resources for minimal returns. Blanket surveillance of the entire solar system skews the signal-to-noise ratio, making analysis impossible for our limited personnel. We try only to focus on relevant newsfeeds and communications from parties of interest (obtained via hacking), though the problem comes from identifying what is relevant to what is not. The average scanner is a nerve-wracked bundle of anxiety and guilt, endlessly fretting over the alerts they've handed off and the reports they didn't pass on. The reports of missing indentured workers on Luna are troubling, but are they signs of a greater problem or just normal political violence? The recent scans of the Jovian flotilla in the Outer Belt indicate a slight chance their ships are infected with a subtle strain of the exsurgent virus, but could that just be an error in our probe's sensors? Scanners ask themselves questions like that every day, and few of them are ever answered definitively. It is an unforgiving job. Scanners spend a lot of time and energy trying to perfect their craft.

Forecasting

Lately, this has meant using complex data modeling to forecast existential threats before they happen. It has limited usefulness compared to our surveillance efforts, but some of our scanners believe that's because we don't have enough data on past threats to create a proper model. They believe that if we could obtain archived mission data from other security agencies and combine it with our own observations, we could have a real breakthrough. I think it's important for you know that Firewall is more than just putting out fires after we see smoke. Eventually, we want to stop the fire before it even starts. We're not there yet, though, so let's talk about what usually happens.

Mission SOPs

Despite your abrupt entry into our organization, we actually do have standard operating procedures and best practices. Operations are not always as chaotic as first impressions may make it seem. Our organization is designed to be as effective as possible in stopping existential threats while not risking its long-term health. In practical terms, this means we operate in a heavily compartmentalized structure, with individual

cells having a great deal of autonomy. You have a great deal of latitude in how you act, as long as you follow the key principles of good tradecraft. The following guidelines in tradecraft—identifying threats, coordinating missions with off-site routers, and communicating with vectors—are not negotiable rules.

Threat Identification

Every mission Firewall launches drains our limited resources and puts the entire organization at risk, no matter how small or innocuous it is. Send a single agent out to pick up some carbon for the team's maker and you risk an Ozma team grabbing and replacing the sentinel with an impersonator. Task an infomorph to watch a popular XP feed on the mesh and you risk her becoming infected with a basilisk hack. Granted these risks are extremely minor, but there is no such thing as a safe or risk-free mission. Every action exposes Firewall to a certain degree. We have to carefully weigh every potential threat against the costs. We also have to make sure we're not chasing a false alarm. Correct threat identification is the key to managing our resources. It is also a very hard skill to master.

Despite their best efforts, scanners sometimes misread the intelligence they analyze. We seldom pursue the easily confirmed threats to transhumanity because local authorities catch the obvious cases. However, legitimate security agencies rarely focus enough on detecting and fighting subtle and wide-ranging threats. They do not go after targets after they flee their local jurisdiction (though they may place a bounty). They often do not even share data with each other, so a threat that travels from the inner system to the rim is free to start all over again. They are subject to the whims of their sponsors, be it a government, hypercorp or autonomist political faction. This leaves us as the final safeguard. Many times, we have to act on ambiguous intelligence only because no one else in the system will. Even if we get a positive confirmation of an exsurgent presence, however, we do not necessarily send in agents.

Contrary to what you might think, we do not scramble erasure squads the instant we detect an exsurgent presence anywhere in the system. After all, we already know about the quarantine zones on Mars, Luna, and other hot spots around the system. If we just wanted to destroy as many TITAN war machines as possible, we could easily set up bases around each zone and go to war, but that's not how we work. Our teams assess threats based on the potential danger to transhumanity, not on the inherent power of the threat itself. A group of Barsoomian terrorists plotting to unleash a nanovirus in Elysium takes precedence over an exsurgent outbreak in a remote brinker habitat in the outer belt. Protecting transhumanity is our singular purpose and we prioritize accordingly. Exactly what constitutes a threat to transhumanity ultimately falls on the judgment of the proxies handling the case. As a sentinel, you just need to know more experienced and informed agents have decided that this mission is worth the risk to you and the organization.

To summarize, Firewall fills in the gaps that no security agency can cover because of limitations inherent to their structure. We act on imperfect information handled by overworked and under-appreciated analysts. Every false alarm costs us precious resources and threatens the organization, but they are unavoidable. A single mistake could doom our entire species. Got the picture? Let's move on.

Coordination and Information Sharing

Scanners also routinely start up ops that are solely intended for more intel gathering. Sometimes we have leads, but not enough data to act on. In this case, sentinels can be posted to investigate, or vectors can be tasked with digging a little deeper. It is also common for scanners to pass data over to crows for more detailed analysis—especially if it requires an expert's eye or specialist knowledge. In cases like these, both vectors and crows can also take the initiative to start a new operation if the information at hand calls for it.

Scanners still have a degree of autonomy and can choose to ignore our compartmentalization protocols when necessary. Often, this happens when someone comes across time sensitive and actionable intel that applies to a distant operational theater. In other words, if someone on Mercury finds out about an impending attack on Oberon, that scanner has discretion to alert our agents stationed there before discussing it with the rest of the local server. The Eye is useful for disseminating intel like that, especially if you want to remain anonymous.

Esoteric information can be traded through the Eye, which we try to encourage. There is no telling what kind of knowledge you may need on a mission. When in doubt, ask the hive mind on the Eye! A current scan of requests on the Eye right now reveals calls for old Earth sports scores, Barsoomian beer recipes, conspiracy theories on the first moon landing, and firmware for a Direct Action kinetic sniper rifle. Remember to give back to the community, as every request draws on your rep.

Mission Coordination

After a particular threat is identified, control of an operation passes to an agent who specializes in coordinating missions. They're called routers, and you should be as nice to them as you can. They're the ones who usually assign missions to sentinels. Sentinels really want routers to be on their side and go the extra kilometer in a crisis. Keep in mind that they have more sentinels to worry about than just your team, and favoritism is inevitable. The assholes who cause almost as much damage as they fix, refuse orders for no good reason, and cause unnecessary drama aren't going to get the same treatment as the sentinels who work well with others. We are a clandestine organization; a degree of hierarchal office politics is unavoidable.

Every router only has so many sentinels and resources under their command, so they may kick up a certain threat to another router or even another server if they don't feel like they can handle it on their own. Usually this happens when the router's sentinels are already on missions or are recovering from other operations. Shit happens. These transfer missions are a pain, because each router tries to optimize their resources for the local operational environment. You don't want autonomist freedom fighters working a mission in hypercorp territory, if you can avoid it. The thing for you to remember when you get a new mission is this: you are not the sole focus of the router's attention. You can't just trust them to always to give you everything you might want for a mission. If you think you need additional resources or you don't understand something, you need to speak up when the mission is first assigned.

Vector Overwatch

The only dedicated support you can count on during a mission is your assigned vector. They are the best comms specialists in transhumanity; I guarantee. The Planetary Consortium or Jovians would have broken us long ago if we didn't have the vectors to keep our communications secure. Every active team gets a vector they can contact through specific and secure methods. Whenever you contact your vector through the proper protocols, you can count that the right people will get your message and act on it if necessary. Don't think of it as a panic button, though. It takes time to send a message through the appropriate channels. The comm protocols vary from mission to mission, but they rarely allow you to contact Firewall in real-time. You usually have to send a message and wait (between minutes and days) to get a reply. This is for your security (though distance lag can also be a hindering factor). If you break protocol and try to contact the vector through outside channels, you can expect to take an i-rep hit for being a dumbass. If the vector says you should only send messages by logging into that free-to-play simulspace game and sending a coded PM to SAUCY_W3nch, then you do just that. If you break protocol and try something else, it's best to assume that other parties may be listening in.

Our vectors are especially skilled at running counter-intrusion on our communications. It might be tempting to break comm silence and to ask one of the organization's hot-shot intrusion specialists to make your job easier for you. I can't stress this enough: resist this urge. Like routers, vectors have a full plate of responsibilities that go beyond interactions with an individual sentinel. They're running simultaneous hacks against polity surveillance software, news organizations, and suspected enemy forces, all whilst connecting your calls. They don't have time to help you take the DRM off a fabber. Vectors are responsible for getting your reports where they need to be and erasing Firewall's digital presence after we're done. The actual success of the operation is entirely up to the sentinels, whether the mission requires hacking or not.

Sentinel Activation

All of the mission coordination and comms setup happens before you're even briefed. Firewall is a well-oiled engine of espionage, after all. By now, you should know the drill. You get a message asking if you'd like to go to the doctor (or whatever code your router gave you), you report in, you get briefed and backed up. We maintain our own backup servers and they are a secure as we can make them—I've seen oligarch vaults with less protection. Some sentinels prefer to make a backup with their regular provider; each server tends to have different policies regarding this. Many view it as a potential risk (backup providers are less secure than we are, and if the sentinel is outed, it can mean trouble), others encourage redundancy, just in case.

The briefing will include your cover, as provided by our vectors (often with the aid of registers and filters). Identity is quite fluid in this day and age, but it isn't totally flexible. Our specialists will do their best, but they're limited in terms of resources as well. Firewall isn't made of fake IDs, after all. Vectors can't prepare for every possible operation theater. Sometimes, despite best efforts, your acting skills are going to be put through a potentially deadly audition. You'll understand what I mean when you're given a disagreeable cover identity that forces you to act in a way contrary to your beliefs. Don't give me that cynical eye roll either. Sentinels tend towards hardcases that think they can handle anything, but everyone has their limits. Even scum swarm members squirm when they go undercover as soul traffickers. We try to match cover identities with sentinels in mind because they're more likely to work, but that isn't always an option. We don't send you into safe or sane corners of the universe. If you're tasked to infiltrate a Hidden Concern operation, you'll have to go in sleeved as an octomorph, regardless of your personal background. Now, we might not send a Jovian to do that because psychotic breakdowns aren't exactly helpful, but any lesser complaints will be ignored. You might have an option to use a cover identity you've developed in previous missions. Many sentinels spend a lot of their downtime creating their own covers, which isn't a bad habit in our line of work. If you can, try to volunteer your own cover if it's a better fit for the mission. Everyone benefits from that kind of cooperation.

Securing Necessary Resources

Registers, routers, and vectors work together to secure the resources for a mission. The registers focus on the logistical aspects, but everyone has to help out with procurement. To be honest, we do a lot of creative accounting through our front organizations to build up credits in the inner system and rep in the outer system. I can't get into our funding in detail, but as a secret paramilitary organization that operates illegally in many jurisdictions, you can assume we cut corners when we can. A lot of our inner system agents complain about the minimal equipment we give them,

but that's what fabbers and blueprints are for. Ask your vector for gear blueprints if you absolutely need something you can't locally source. Our most valuable resources aren't our guns, bots, morphs, or tactical nukes though—it's our network. Whatever resources you get should be viewed as a bonus to the essential intel and favors provided through the Eye. Of course, these intangible assets don't matter as much when you're gunning down exsurgent-infected colonists on a gatecrashing gig, so we should talk about proper resource utilization in Firewall for a bit.

Firewall Resources

Gear should be viewed as expendable. Most of the time, you have to ditch your gear after a mission anyway. We don't want a weapon used in a wetwork job traced to another sentinel down the line. This is not an invitation to waste or resell Firewall-assigned equipment though. You are not here to make an extra bit of credit or rep on the side. Most of the equipment you get from us is produced by illegally modified fabbers. DRM is counter-productive to our needs. Any item you can't account for becomes a liability to the organization. Oversight agents have shut down operations by tracing discarded equipment to its original fabber. Disassemble or space gear after use, but only when you are sure it's no longer necessary. Morphs are an exception to this rule though. Even we can't afford to space morphs after a mission, except under dire circumstances.

Providing Morphs

We have to work within the constraints of the local operational environment, which means we do not usually maintain infrastructure like body banks. That's hard to hide, even in the outer system. Some of our teams maintain their own facilities, but those are usually specialized groups like erasers or some of our gatecrashing teams. The average sentinel either uses their own morph or a morph from a commercial body bank for missions that require farcasting. Routers try to procure morphs suited for the job, but time and the local morph economy ultimately determine what sentinels will have for the mission. Sentinels can request specialized morphs, but you will be very lucky to get exactly what you want. Many sentinels prefer to make their own arrangements when resleeving.

It's easy for newbie sentinels to think agents who don't need to farcast for missions have it easy: they can use their own personal morph, right?. This attitude disappears after the first mission. If you haven't been gut shot or infected by an exsurgent virus, you'll still be paranoid about leaving behind trace evidence. Even synthmorphs leave behind forensic clues that can be tied to a make and model. It's also hard to explain certain incongruities like new implants or odd scars to people in your civilian life. Most hypercorp workers do not need military grade nanoware, after all. Maintaining a secondary morph solely for Firewall missions in a home habitat solves those problems. Talk to your router about it between

missions if you're interested in the option. Most agents who go this route use a cheap model like a splicer or case for their civilian life and then heavily invest in their Firewall morph. Keeping a single morph in good condition isn't too hard, especially for synthmorphs. Rent storage space under an assumed identity and stash it there until activation.

Preparation for farcasting missions is more difficult, but good sentinels can still make arrangements ahead of time. Ask favors from local sentinels to help you find or modify the morph you want. It's better to spend some rep getting a good morph than trying to hoard it for later use in the mission. Some routers hate it when sentinels go around them, but you're the one who's going into harm's way. If you know you will be sent into a given area, you might invest in a morph to store in a body bank ahead of time. This especially applies to sentinels working in the outer system. You do not want to try to pull off a hard breach of a remote brinker habitat with a shitty hibernoid or case. I would advise renting the morph out when off-site to make up for invested rep and credit. If it's unavailable for a last minute mission, you'll still have whatever the router can scrounge up for you.

After a mission, you may need to get rid of the morph. Spacing it is an option, but selling it may be better. A new morph owner creates a false lead for potential adversaries so that they lose invaluable time and resources chasing a dead end instead of you. Your conscience will probably be bothered at the prospect of setting up some poor hypercorp wage slave, so I advise selling it to a criminal syndicate like Los Ghouls, Nine Lives, or Pax Familae. They use good tradecraft, so they drag out a false lead. Plus, pitting two of our enemies against each other is always a bonus. If you lack the savvy to set up that kind of deal, offer the morph on the Eye. Other sentinels can dispose of it for you or find a better use for the morph.

CACHES

As I mentioned earlier, you may want to set up a place to stash a dedicated Firewall morph, so you might as well also use it to store additional equipment. Fabbers and makers can only create so much gear. Exotic items like quantum-entangled communicators cannot be made on demand. Other gear (like weapons) are restricted or illegal in most jurisdictions, and hacking fabbers to build them is time consuming and risky. For these reasons, it is better to create supply caches. Servers spend a lot of time creating caches for sentinel usage, but it never hurts to create your own stash.

Every cache should be set up by an entirely separate identity unconnected to any other cover you're using. A generic "Wang Tao" or "John Smith" identity with just enough credits or rep to pay for the storage space is all you need. Make all arrangements over the mesh (via anonymizers) and use disguises when visiting the storage space. This counts for hidden caches built outside habitats as well as ones set up inside. Even if you're a clever engineer who's cutting out a hollow space inside an asteroid somewhere in the Belt, you still had to buy fuel and materials to build it. Do not forget security either. If you have the skills to rig sensors, alarms, traps, and self-destruct systems, you should go for it. If you do not, ask on the Eye for advice. Some agents have uploaded detailed plans and schematics for cache layouts. I would avoid going overboard though. It is tempting to build your cache as far away as possible and arm it with enough defense systems to make it a bunker, but that is missing the point. A cache is a disposable asset, ideally only used once. Do not get too invested in it.

Supply caches should never become a liability to you or Firewall. No matter how valuable the equipment is or how rare it is, you have to be able to walk

SCRATCH SPACES

Start Æther Jabber
Active Members: 3

Z1: The work of a register is never done.
X3: Oh? Still not done? I can send a beta fork to help with the grunt work.
Z1: No, it's not that. There aren't that many scratch spaces in New Shanghai. The security audit is already done.
Q2: Scratch spaces?
X3: Oh right, you're new. That's what we call our temporary storage facilities and caches.
Z1: Not so temporary.
X3: What do you mean?
Z1: The external security of the scratch spaces was fine but the inventory revealed a lot of leftovers from old missions. Some items were dated back to right before the Fall.
X3: Shit. I didn't realize it was that bad.
Q2: I'm sure a few old weapons or tools sitting in storage aren't so bad.
X3: We use them to store things recovered during missions. Weird things. Unidentified things. They're supposed to be moved to appropriate facilities when possible though.
Z1: Yeah, that didn't happen. Check out this partial list.
Q2: Half of these just say "Unidentified object—unknown provenance—mission referrer data missing"
Z1: Did you look at the readings I got from them?
X3: The hell is that?
Q2: Object #1389 has got to be TITAN tech.
Z1: They're all inert as far as I can tell. But we need to clean house and soon.
Q2: With who? The entire server is on assignment or recovering from a prior op.
X3: I recognize the tag on #6572—that means it was taken out of the Fissure Gate.
Z1: We're on Mars. How did it get here? And why? ♣

away from it. Nor should its contents ever be used against you if it is captured by enemy agents. If there is incriminating evidence or something you would risk your life to retrieve, it does not belong in a Firewall supply cache. You have no way of knowing how much time will pass between the creation and usage of the cache. It could be weeks or it could be years. Our enemies are clever and skilled. Any security you install could be subverted. Any countermeasure could be compromised. If there is even a hint that the cache has been found by the enemy, you have to walk away. The lure of shiny plasma rifles and reaper morphs has trapped more than one sentinel. No tool is worth risking your stack falling into Ozma's hands. Once you go on enough missions, you will see the best tools are not guns or bombs, but other people.

ALLIES

That probably sounded a bit too sociopathic for your liking, but this line of work requires manipulating others to do what you want. The need for reliable contacts and allies is essential. Unlike morphs or comm systems, you should not rely on Firewall to provide these to you. Allies that only you know about will be necessary if other agents in your team (including, say, a router or vector) are compromised by the enemy.

As I have mentioned several times, the Eye is an invaluable tool for building a personal network. Make friends with other sentinels during your downtime. You would be surprised at how much socialization goes on in there. Proxies try to discourage it, but chatter is inevitable. It is easier to relate to other agents who understand your position and can sympathize with your problems. You can also get a second opinion about the decision-making capabilities of your router or proxy. If you think the people above you made a bad call, better to contact someone on the Eye. Unfortunately, the other members of the Eye can be less-than-reliable at times. Your new friends have to go on missions of their own and may be unavailable for a long time. We're also widely scattered around the solar system, so they are seldom in position to help out in a crisis. In other words, do not neglect the rest of transhumanity when looking for allies.

A good ally is trustworthy, predictable, and controllable. This is not to say they must be boring hypercorp drones or mindless ultimate thugs. Even a flighty scum swarm drug dealer can be a good ally if you know how she will act in a crisis and when she is lying to you. Cultivate them by doing them favors on your off time. Some sentinels try to build up blackmail fodder while others prefer to earn their trust by finding allies who support our mission. Use the approach that works best for you. While you should be friendly towards them, don't think of them as friends. Like supply caches, they are best used infrequently. Any time you use an ally in a Firewall mission, you put them at risk and you might have to disappear from their life forever. Getting too attached to an ally is a serious mistake. It is hard work building up enough trust with someone, so trying to hold onto an ally after you've burned them one too many times is understandable. If you want to avoid that kind of scene, use deniable assets like mercenaries.

DENIABLE ASSETS

Sometimes you want an ally, other times you just need a hired gun. Allies are better for soft favors like providing a hideout or researching something. Taking down a triad gang or hacking a secure vault is better handled by professionals. Mercenaries and freelancers can provide much needed firepower and expertise, but using them while maintaining operational security is easier said than done. You not only need the requisite credits to hire them, but a plausible cover story about why you need their services. It is never permissible to admit Firewall's existence to a mercenary, who by the nature of their profession is inherently untrustworthy. Mercenaries are paranoid, so a good cover story is essential. If they discover the real reason why you need help, they may sell you out to Oversight or worse.

The best cover story is an unremarkable one that raises no questions about the job. Posing as an ego hunter or skip tracer can work wonders if you can pull it off. They are frequent customers of mercenary services, ranging from hacking to tactical assaults. It is not recommended if you're not a good liar or don't have actual expertise in that profession, though. Infosec specialists can be fooled with any number of stories, simply because so many people call on their services. Everyone from jilted lovers to ambitious hypercorp workers could have a good motive to hack into a secure system. Many of them, however, take the time to doublecheck their client's story online, so make sure you're covered. Mercenaries, ultimates, and other grunts are harder to fool, however. Despite their bravado, they can be quite cautious when it comes to taking jobs. After all, they risk resleeving every time they go to work. As a result, anyone hiring a merc can expect a background check of sorts. The more dangerous and complex the job is, the more they will check you out. You need to create a simple narrative that reinforces their own beliefs. Tell the ultimates you want those brinker cultists dead because you hate their religion, not because an exhuman terrorist is hiding among them. Mercs and security contractors find profit-based motives more understandable than altruism (especially of the preventing existential threats kind). Give them a reason to believe there's money to be made killing exsurgents.

Even though they may betray you, do not treat mercenaries as cannon fodder. Sometimes it may be unavoidable, but a freelancer who does their job and goes home happy is better than a resleeved one who wants answers from their client. If you set a

mercenary up, they will look for you later on, and that will cause problems, especially if you leave out crucial intel on their mission. Leave out the part about how the brinker cultists are infected with the exsurgent virus and you can expect payback. If you are lucky, they will burn the cover identity you used to hire them. The worst-case scenario involves them finding out about your involvement with Firewall. If they get killed on a mission, send them a big bonus to keep them happy.

DIY RESOURCES

Try to make the most of what we give you, but learn how to cultivate your own resources for missions. Creativity and innovation in procurement are not only encouraged, but are damn near essential. As I mentioned earlier, carrying blueprints and hacking fabbers is a common method to acquire more gear, but not the only one available to you. Substitution, social engineering (which is to say: lying), trade, larceny, and grave robbing are all opportunities to gain what you need. Each method has its own risks and costs, but if you need something for a mission and can't get it through us or from a fabber, you will have to try one of them.

It is easy to get caught up in a consumer mindset and believe that only one particular piece of equipment will make or break a mission, but readily available substitutes can work just as well. A diamond ax is a better choice for taking down a lightly armed target than a plasma weapon because they are easier to acquire and draw less attention from automated sensor systems. Triggering a hull breach, though overkill, is as effective as any grenade and half as traceable. For military targets, think of lateral solutions like running a false flag operation on them. The Direct Action fire team may be too much for you, but a bit of creative infosec can give the local triads reason to believe the mercs are moving in on their territory. Failing that, many problems can be solved with creative and liberal usage of high explosives or disassembler nanoswarms. Personally, I'm partial to mining charges.

Charismatic agents specialize in social engineering, but anyone can be a good liar. It is possible to convince anyone to give you anything, if you just know the right approach. Most of the time, you will not have the time to figure out that approach, but everyone has their own psychological blind spots and weaknesses. The best lies are simple and raise no questions. A good story reinforces the beliefs of the target and misdirects them. An autonomist can be swayed with a convincing tale of woe or oppression at the hands of Jovian assholes and hypercorp executive types always want to impress their peers. Use those motivations to persuade the target that their goals will be fulfilled if they give you whatever item or favor you want from them. If you've pitched the right idea to them, they will convince themselves. However, if outright lying doesn't work, you can always try to trade with the target.

Trading is another word for bribery in many jurisdictions, but even the most fanatical brinker zealot is amenable to certain trades under the right circumstances. Information about enemies of the target and recreational contraband are usually safe bets as offers. As with mercenaries, invent a cover story for why you need something from them and then offer the trade. Many Firewall agents spend a lot of time discussing what works best for bribes in various jurisdictions. Jovians crave illegal media (especially porn) while scum swarm members love inside gossip about inner-system celebrities and politicians (though they won't admit it). Finding trade goods can be easier than acquiring equipment or getting favors directly, so keep it in mind.

Theft is also a popular but dangerous tactic. Even autonomist habitats have customs about shared tool usage and circumventing them is viewed as theft. We do not have time to go over proper burglary techniques in this session, but if you already know how, then I recommend stealing when possible. It is a risk, but you're always at risk during a mission; the trick is weighing it against a reward. A higher risk of being stopped by local law enforcement in exchange for a lower risk of exsurgent infection is usually an acceptable trade-off.

For the record, Firewall does recommend looting the morphs of dead combatants when applicable. Obviously, targets infected with the exsurgent virus should not be touched, but most thugs and security guards should be fine to loot. Weapons almost always have security systems, but they can be hacked. Just be careful of shock grips and other traps when you pick them up.

Many times, using a combination of these techniques will lead to better results. Bribe someone to look the other way so you can steal an item that is a substitute for another piece of equipment. It is best to think of the ultimate goal you want and then work backwards to your current position. If you want a plasma rifle that is stored in the security officer's locker, determine what security measures are there to keep you from stealing it and how they can be circumvented. The other guards can be distracted by bribing a local triad to start a fight in the cafeteria. The alarms can be disabled by reprogramming that engineer nanoswarm you got from the local fabber. The infomorph security monitor can be tricked by impersonating an internal security auditor prone to give every helpful employee a promotion. You get the idea. Equipment acquisition can become a mission onto itself, so try not to let it eclipse the real reason why you're in the field. Did you really need that plasma rifle in the first place, or could you have used an engineer nanoswarm to sabotage life support and door locks in the target's personal quarters instead?

ERASURE SQUADS

Not every mission can be completed by the initial team. Backup is available in the form of our erasure squads. They are our dedicated tactical fire teams and each squad is a formidable military presence.

Erasers are some of the most dedicated and experienced warriors in the history of our species. While the ultimates pride themselves on their martial prowess, they do not regularly pick fights with TITAN war machines, exsurgent-infected terrorists, and other existential threats. The erasure squads are expected to fight anywhere in the galaxy at any given time. They are trained to fight equally well on the surface of Mercury as they are in the Oort Cloud. Of course, some hot zones and high-value theaters (like heavily populated habs) have standby teams, ready to deploy at any given time. However, they are still bound by the same limitations as the rest of us, namely our resources and need for complete deniability. They are not miracle workers.

Even though you are on the front lines and risking the most, you do not get to decide if an erasure squad is sent in or not. At best, you can ask for one through the vector. The request is then sent up to the router. Routers are usually authorized to make the call, but their ass is also on the line if everything goes nova, so if they have the time they'll take it to a proxy vote first. When making the request, take the time to give a persuasive argument about sending our big guns in, backed up with evidence supporting your claims. If you don't have time to make a proper request, it's too late anyway, which brings me to my next point.

If there are hints in advance that an operation may require the heavy hitters, your router may have them on standby, but don't count on it. In most cases, erasure squads need time to prepare before a mission. They almost always have to farcast in, which means resleeving and arming up. They also need time to plan for their mission. They seldom run in, guns blazing, except when there is absolutely no other choice. An assault on a hardened bunker inside an asteroid in deep space can take weeks of planning and simul-space training to execute. Many times, the router will request your help to accommodate the squad's arrival. Some erasure squads do not work with sentinels, though, in order to enhance operational security. Don't be offended if the squad only asks for you to get out of the way when they come in.

Every proxy uses their own standards when it comes to the proper utilization of erasers. Lone erasers can be precise and quiet, but they often lack the punch to take out a major threat the way an entire erasure squad might. Given their reputation for wide-scale destruction, some are reluctant to send erasers on any missions that require finesse. Rescue missions and operations in high population areas can be hard to clear with some proxies. Even clear-cut missions such as extermination runs on exhumans or exsurgents can be mishandled. Make no mistake: erasure squads pack heavy firepower and phrases like "collateral damage" and "acceptable losses" are common descriptions in their after-mission reports. Even the most sensitive proxy will greenlight desperate missions in the right circumstances, of course. We will not allow another Fall.

Mission Factors

A number of variables are used by routers to allocate resources to sentinels in the field. Similar factors are analyzed by proxies in after-action reports. These debriefs provide invaluable data points for scanner algorithms and play a large role in establishing a sentinel's i-rep. In short, expect Firewall to grade your work. The opinions of peers can have immediate consequences during an operation and inform the decisions of routers coordinating future missions. So we need to talk about the rubric by which sentinel performance is judged and give some advice for adhering to best practices.

Though everyone is *eventually* held accountable, I should note that a sentinel's autonomy while on a mission is nearly total. The hierarchal structure and public accountability of traditional intelligence organizations limits their operations in reach, scope, and speed. Many an Oversight auditor would rather watch a habitat get disassembled into grey goo before acting without a supervisor's approval. Firewall can't afford such restrictions. Sentinels are selected precisely for their ability to read situations and take action quickly. They are often the first people to see the big picture, and their strategy for dealing with threats almost always goes unquestioned during an operation. Even Firewall resources, though ostensibly the responsibility of routers and other proxies, are dispensed based on the information the sentinel provides … or doesn't provide. You are a chokepoint in the flow of active intelligence. It's a role that holds a lot of power. Just don't expect to get away with abusing it for long.

The mixture of autonomy and accountability a sentinel must weigh when considering the following mission factors is best described by an old Earth saying: "We're giving you enough rope with which to hang yourself."

Choosing a Course of Action

Each sentinel's brief plays a huge role in deciding between remote methods of surveillance and less deniable tactics. Being tasked to upload a worm on a mesh network has a very different parameter for success than a win scenario for wetwork. In instances where methods aren't detailed by the brief, young agents should know that Firewall always prefers subtlety. The fact that a sentinel was tasked at all is the result of thousands of hours spent collating and analyzing passive intelligence through sophisticated, untraceable electronic surveillance. We like to watch and wait. Always aim for tactics that provide additional opportunities even in instances of failure. For instance, it's hard for eavesdropping in a crowded Martian souk to go wrong; you either overheard the intel or you didn't. Breaking into a hypercorp office to plant quantum-dot cameras, on the other hand, presents the same risk of mission failure *and* places the whole organization in jeopardy. Whenever possible, keep things quiet and report in to your router.

When Missions Fail

Standing by …
You are now connected to Chat-Anon
Sentinel1: Hello? Please respond.
Vector: Go ahead.
Sentinel1: It's over. We're fucked. They had an async.
Vector: I don't follow.
Sentinel1: Mary spotted him right before the meet, but by then it was too late. They had him shake hands with Chan to "seal the deal." Fuckers.
Vector: I see. So the async saw through your cover?
Sentinel1: Yeah, they jumped Mary and Chan a second later. I had the drones open fire, but it wasn't enough.
Vector: Did you destroy the package?
Sentinel1: I activated the swarms, but I think they had guardians set up. I don't know. Last I saw, it was still intact.
Vector: Are you safe?
Sentinel1: Yeah, I was a few kilometers out, jamming in one of the drones. I bugged out as soon as I lost contact.
Vector: Please stand by.
17 minutes later
Vector: I've relayed your message to the router. We're scrubbing the mission. Proceed to the agreed-upon farcasting facility.
Sentinel1: What? We still have time to stop them.
Vector: Given their past behavior, they will likely have reinforced their security by the time we can place new operatives there.
Sentinel1: Then transfer me as many credits as you can. I can build a drone strike force in a day, but I need to buy the raw materials for the fabber.
Vector: No, you are to come in for debriefing. We cannot risk losing you.
Sentinel1: I can backup and send it to you before I go in. I have my kill switch installed so they won't get my stack. We can't let these fuckers get away with it!
Vector: If you attack and fail, they'll go to ground. You know that, right?
Sentinel1: THEY HAVE THE PACKAGE!
Vector: You are the only one who is still able to give us any kind of insight. If we are going to stop them, you need to come in.
Sentinel1: What the fuck? This is our job. We're supposed to keep fighting, no matter what.
Vector: We have the big picture in mind. You don't. Lose a battle, win the war.
Sentinel1: What are they going to do with the package?
Vector: It doesn't matter. Your job is done. ♣

The proxy servers will run risk/reward analysis and suggest a course of action.

Of course, the entire purpose of sentinels is to remain effective in the field despite the absence of command structure. Golden opportunities for intelligence gathering and sabotage often have tight security windows. You might have to make a move

without getting feedback from your router. Sadly, in my experience, Firewall is as prone to confirmation bias in these cases as any traditional organization. I subbed in as a router for this field operative one time. She stole a courier's identity, walked through the front airlock of a secure research facility, and picked up the intel like she was running a go-cycle courier service. She did it all right in front of the leader of a singularity seeker terrorist cell. It was a bold move. Her rep on the Eye soared as everyone talked about her "strategic foresight" and "improvisation." When the package turned out to be an exsurgent trap that wiped out an entire crow research facility, those same agents that were praising her before couldn't stop talking about how reckless and stupid she'd been.

There's no hard-and-fast rule for judging these things. Your ability to think on your feet is why we're speaking right now. Always err on the side of caution except in instances of confirmed x-threats or exsurgent activity. In that case, going loud could be the only sane option. If recent history has taught us anything, it's that a well-placed plasma grenade from a quick thinker can save billions of lives. Just be sure to collect enough data to cover your ass in the debrief before you make the switch from spy to exterminator.

Destroy, Contain, or Study

Any sentinel good enough to stay in the field is going to come across TITAN artifacts or exsurgent-virus carriers eventually. For obvious reasons, how agents handle these elements receives more scrutiny in Firewall after-action reports than anything else. The procedural flowcharts I've forwarded you cover this decision process exhaustively. For now, suffice to say that assessment algorithms require the greatest burden of proof for co-optation, then containment, and then destruction. A likely source of danger with known x-threat potential is usually enough to warrant destruction so long as the conspiracy isn't exposed in the process. Containment is only judged suitable in instances where the threat is confirmed immobile and located *far* from transhuman population centers. Even then, destruction is typically preferred except in instances where the use of force is more likely to do harm than good. For instance, the White Zones are so cross-contaminated with unclassified exsurgent infections that the risk of a cascading pandemic event precludes any action to cleanse the territory. It's better to avoid a hydra than try to cut off all of its heads. Similarly, containment is preferable if destruction would expose the organization. If there's an exhuman cult on the brink being closely monitored by autonomist killsats, it's much easier to monitor the feeds and ensure they don't leave than it is to slip a strike team in unnoticed.

Sometimes it's better to fight fire with fire, so we occasionally co-opt technology we recover in the field. Co-optation is best handled by containing an object or site and giving the crows enough time to study the situation and make a decision. Co-optation of post-singularity or alien technology (or other assets) by sentinels in the field is discouraged; odds are they don't have a full understanding of what it is they're handling, and the risks are too great. If it's an option, you should check with your router first. There are very strong and mixed opinions within Firewall on how to tackle situations like this, and their response may well depend on the factional ideology to which they adhere.

So how do you know what protocol is best? The standard Destroy, Contain, or Study (DCS) test is a good place to start. It's a set of assessments to quickly determine the optimal action to take with a particular technology. Mission variables mean that even that protocol cannot be applied with 100% consistency. The unhelpful answer is that you should learn the politics of your proxy. Vaporizing a dud TITAN missile lodged in an uninhabited Luna crater is as likely to receive a commendation as a reprimand, depending on whether a pragmatist or conservative writes the after-action report. In my opinion, if nobody had to get resleeved, you made the right choice. Put transhuman life first, make a decision, and live with the consequences. Plenty of peers in the organization know first-hand about the snap decisions required on a mission. They'll back most sentinels even if an op goes bad. The consequences of a bad call are usually punishment enough anyway.

Last Resorts

When I was first recruited, my server had me sim some actual XP from Firewall ops—the kind of ops where every option was a bad one. They then ran me through some ops simulations. During the briefings on these sims, all I could do was worry about worst-case, no-win scenarios. You know, the hard choices. Could I order an orbital strike on a hab? Could I call in an erasure squad, knowing they would cleanse a facility of life? It ate me up inside, and I suppose that's why Firewall wanted me. They only recruit psychopaths for a few niche positions. Most of us are here in part *because* we have a conscience, regardless of what the job may end up doing to it.

As a sentinel, you should know that you are not expected to make that call on your own. If containment is no longer an option—an exsurgent strain reaches exponential amplification, a TITAN takes control of major infrastructure, etc.—a sentinel's first and only priority is to get as much intel off site as possible. Get it to the router, and they'll make the call—or better yet, if there's time, they'll call a vote within the server. It's imperative that they have all the relevant information to make an informed call, while preparing erasure squads and the filters needed to cover their tracks. If trapped in a full-blown outbreak, you might live or die based on the router's decision, but at least the other casualties won't rest entirely on your conscience.

Though sentinels lack the clearance to order extreme quarantine actions, it would be a lie to say they don't carry some responsibility after operations escalate into extremes. There may not be enough time to blind peer-review mission data and make recommendations according to protocol. When seconds matter, a proxy might call for an immediate go/no-go assessment. Sentinels are the experts on-site, and their judgment may have to do in a pinch.

If the proxies can't be reached, there's not enough time given the signal lag, or every second means more deaths—then it's up to you, my friend. I don't envy you if you ever find yourself in this situation. Dodging the horrors of the Fall reborn makes objective, dispassionate decision making nearly impossible, but that is exactly what will be required of you. Just remember, you wouldn't even know we existed if we didn't think you were capable of making the right choice.

LOCAL AUTHORITIES

Firewall has many partners in the fight for transhumanity. The key is making sure those partners think they're fighting alone. The powers-that-be on a mission site can certainly pose a risk to operations, but it would be a mistake to neglect local authorities as a field asset.

AVOIDING

Firewall demands complete deniability. A sentinel's work is 95% avoiding detection. If local authorities get involved, situations often get messy. Their investigations might lead them to stumble onto things that are best kept quiet, or worse they may put other lives at risk. Even friendly anarchist militias can interfere with an op, and other groups may well pose a threat to Firewall itself. Outfits like the Jovians or Oversight do not react kindly when they learn of active sentinels in their theater. There's no amount of training to prepare you for the torture software they use to scour a captured ego for intelligence. That's not even the worst-case scenario: security forces might be co-opted by an exsurgent threat or actively seeking to profit from a TITAN artifact.

The risks of discovery mean secondary and tertiary identities are a must for field agents. Have disguises, escape routes, and contingency plans in place. This way, even if you have to play your hand and come out of the shadows on an op, you can keep the authorities from figuring out who you are. Better yet, plant some leads that point them towards other groups. It's often better to have the local police thinking they were dealing with criminal involvement or even a hypercorp black ops team, instead of having them wonder what this new group of well-armed operatives was about.

The advantage to operating completely off their radar is that you can use the locals to your advantage. If they're following the same leads you are, you can surveil them to see what angles of investigation they cover first. There's no need to acquire the gear to perform your own forensic analysis of a crime scene when you can just hack the official report.

TIPPING THEM OFF

Though sentinels must fear discovery, more often than not our interests align with local authorities. Most habitats don't desire extinction any more than Firewall does. In these instances, a good spoofing software and an anonymous tip can put military force at the disposal of an otherwise over-matched sentinel. This isn't recommended in instances where the threat's transmission vector or full capabilities aren't completely understood. Raids by unprepared security forces might just speed the rate of infection or get a lot of people killed. For fully-assessed targets, however, local authorities provide a good mixture of firepower and deniability. Furthermore, a failed raid by security forces lets the enemy know only that transhumanity is defending itself in general. Options remain open. A sentinel team that gets wiped out and uploaded, on the other hand, puts all of Firewall at risk.

RECRUITING

This might sound familiar. Sentinels are urged to keep track of any locals that cope exceptionally well with chaotic situations, especially those relating to the exsurgent virus, TITANS, and x-threats. The most common way Firewall discovers these individuals is when sentinels manipulate local factions to their own ends. That job last year? The one out in the zone? The agent responsible for putting you out there had you tapped for recruitment before you even got out of that healing vat. Don't ask for a name. I don't know.

I understand. It's a shitty deal when you're just trying to live your life. But I meant it when I said that you'll come to understand why you're needed and necessary—probably sooner than you'd like. I suggest filing away what you're feeling right now and saving it for the day *you* start tagging plucky so-and-sos from your ops and notifying HR. Can Firewall survive without them, or is it worth lashing that person's life to a greater cause?

INFO SHARING

We much prefer info *stealing*. Yet, too often, sentinels find themselves in situations where we need intel only local authorities can provide. Digital intrusion and black bag jobs are risky even for experts. Brokering a trade—or "swapping spit," as spies used to call it on Earth—*can* be safer, but not by much. The more likely a government is to jealously guard life-saving information, the more likely they are to be hostile to Firewall. Still, the organization comes across a lot of "junk" secrets unrelated to the cause that most inner-system polities would nonetheless kill for. Intelligence that restructures a hypercorp or sees a Jovian coup of an autonomist habitat may be worth giving up in exchange for secrets that keep transhumanity from going extinct.

When brokering deals, consult with your router before contacting the authorities. They'll need to task filters and vectors to comb the Eye's databases for information commodities that are confirmed

THREAT THRESHOLDS

Black-1: Completely inanimate. Origins can be reasonably hypothesized. Multiple transhumans of varying morphs were exposed before containment with no recognizable effect. The purpose and effect of the artifact are demonstrably benign or remain inscrutable. Containment and extraction to a secure Firewall research facility recommended.

Blue-2: Biological. Origins likely reproducible in a lab setting. Effects may be deleterious to transhuman health but are confirmed non-infectious and dependent upon direct exposure. Reasonable to infer that the intentions of the creator didn't include weaponization. Containment secure and all exposed individuals known to Firewall. Recommend securing site until crows can be dispatched for direct study or removal to a secure location.

Green-3: Biological or possibly xenobiological. Origins possibly evolutionary or weaponized. Demonstrates lethal effects to transhuman health and/or possesses high potential for lethality. Infectious nature unknown. Containment meets lab standards and all exposed individuals are accounted for in quarantine. Recommend securing site until crows can be dispatched for direct study or removal to a secure location.

Yellow-4: Biological or xenobiological. Origins evolutionary or weaponized. Demonstrates lethal effects to transhuman health. Infectious nature confirmed and deemed capable of aerosol transmission and/or mutation. Containment meets lab standards and all exposed individuals detained in equivalent quarantine or confirmed purged of morph. Recommend securing site until crows can be dispatched for direct study. Removal is likely to constitute WMD smuggling and deemed a risk to opsec. Destroy on site if simulspace feasibility tests on lengthy containment fail a 90% probability of success.

Orange-5: Biological, xenobiological, or nanotechnological. Origins assuredly evolutionary or weaponized. Target/object possesses means of locomotion and/or signs of intelligence. Demonstrates lethal effects to transhuman health or the potential thereof. Infectious nature confirmed or uncertain. Containment uncertain due to the possibility of interference from the object/target. Recommend destruction. Collect samples after-action only if equipped with lab-standard atmospheric segregation and cold storage tools.

Red-6: Nanotechnological. Origins unknown. Exhibits behaviors and characteristics of known strains established post-Fall. Target/object reactive against containment but displaying no markers of self-sustaining femtotech. Lethality and infection assumed. Containment includes total atmospheric and mesh isolation, including vacuum and electromagnetic caging to prevent cloud locomotion. Exposed individuals purged of morph, and sentinels responsible kept in quarantine after desleeving. Containment dependent upon organization's ability to set up a full research station on site. Any breach or possible breach of containment upgrades threshold to Magenta-7.

Magenta-7: Nanotechnological. Origins unknown. Exhibits behaviors or characteristics of known strains established post-Fall or constitutes new strain. Target/object reactive against containment and/or displays markers for self-sustaining femtotech. Lethality and infection confirmed. Containment not deemed possible. Recommend immediate and total destruction of exposed area and individuals utilizing both plasma and EMP weaponry.

Purple-8: Digital or adaptable medium. Suspected x-threat. Origins unknown. Exhibits behaviors or characteristics of TITAN or ASI manufacture. Psi, cognitive, memetic, and digital transmission capabilities suspected. Lethality and infection assumed but unconfirmed. Containment is total, meeting Firewall lab standards. Site is located at least 100 km from nearest transhuman population center, surveillance-free, and mesh isolated. Projections for lengthy containment exceed a 99% success rate. Recommend standing guard until Firewall can establish specialist research base and on-site WMD failsafes. All personnel responsible for initial discovery and contact to be purged of morph and restored from backup after debrief.

White-9: Digital or adaptable medium. Confirmed exsurgent strain. Composition variable. Origins unknown. Exhibits no quantifiable behaviors or characteristics of any known manufacture. Psi, cognitive, memetic, and digital transmission capabilities confirmed. Cross-contamination into biological and nanotechnological transmission vectors underway. Lethality and infection ongoing, exponential, and of variable latency. Containment deemed impossible. Recommend destruction with extreme prejudice, up to and including orbital strikes and WMD deployment. All personnel responsible for discovery and contact to be purged of morph and restored from backup without debrief. ■

100% unrelated to x-threats and promise value to the target. If the deal's approved, the sentinel will be provided a scrubbed version of the files with all traces of how Firewall came into possession of them eliminated. Then comes the hard part. Firewall demands complete deniability. It's not enough to assure there isn't enough evidence for a court; we can't be known to *exist*. This means any information sharing deals have to be done under false pretenses, the sentinel operating through cut-out assets or an identity that would plausibly hold the secrets and need the information requested for the trade. Composing a legend that cuts so close to Firewall's interests while keeping the conspiracy hidden requires true craft and no small amount of gall. When it's discovered clandestine deals are arranged under false pretenses, morphs tend to get shot and egos thrown in psychosurgery interrogation suites. So make sure you have your emotional dampers on before you try it, newbie.

As with everything else, necessity might render proper protocol a luxury you can't afford. Maybe intel obtained on-site is what the authorities want and there's no time to scrub Firewall's prints of the package. Maybe you want to ignore my advice and actually trust some security official to have transhumanity's best interests at heart. Even if it doesn't get you killed, be aware that there's no such thing as a protected source in Firewall. If you come under a server audit and the proxies find it necessary, they're going to source that intel even if it means cutting it out of you.

Handling Artifacts

The rule for handling TITAN, xenoarcheological, and exsurgent artifacts is simple: don't. Avoid even passive contact (sight, sound, etc.) with suspicious technology, objects, and substances. The primary task of a sentinel is to make sure others do the same until crows or disposal teams can be dispatched. Of course, sentinels exist to do whatever is necessary as soon as it is necessary. You might be put into a situation where understanding an artifact is vital to mission success or moving locations is the only way to effectively quarantine. What follows are the summarized protocols for such situations. Keep in mind that these are greatly simplified procedures for quick reference. Crows spend their entire lives and massive budgets studying dangerous materials safely. Conducting studies in the field is the equivalent of trying to disarm a bomb with a hammer.

Quarantine Protocols

Every sentinel's top priority when encountering new artifacts is quarantine. This procedure is similar to the preparation of crime scenes for analysis. Take care to avoid moving anything, especially the object. Its location and orientation may contain valuable clues. However, leaving the artifact where it lies may not be an option if the area is in a high traffic zone. If the object is portable, transportation should ideally be performed in a faraday suit and through means that minimize contact with other transhumans as much as possible. Furthermore, the agent in charge of moving the artifact should be prepared to undergo extensive quarantine procedures, up to and including abandoning the current morph and resleeving from backup.

If the artifact can't be moved and/or the site can potentially be controlled, limiting access is key. Tap any available resources to redirect transhuman traffic from the site. Subverting or tricking surveillance is equally important and may involve diverting patrols, retasking satellites, or disguising against drone sensors across multiple spectrums. The object should be kept from view, interaction with mesh signals, and contact with the exterior atmosphere. A sealed faraday cage is ideal, but agents in the past have had to make do with as little as a sheet of fabric. Something as simple as putting a bag over it can reduce the risk of transferring airborne biological and digital strains of the exsurgent virus, while also disrupting possible basilisk and YGBM mind hacks. The object should not go completely unobserved. Establish video surveillance using a fiberoptic camera, feeding into the quarantine zone via hard-link connection wired into the lowest-resolution display possible. Sophisticated visual and auditory basilisks require the pixel ratio of modern technology to work effectively through digital video. The implementation of archaic technologies allows for dangerous visual phenomenon to remain monitored without risking the observer's mind.

Once isolation is achieved, monitoring those that come in contact with the object is the next task. Establish video and audio surveillance around the site, using a secure, hardwired network. Carefully log any fellow agents that have contact with the object and back up these lists off-site. In the event of an exsurgent outbreak, it's vital for response teams to find all individuals who came in contact with the transmission vector as quickly as possible. Needless to say, the quarantine site should be guarded at all costs.

The easiest way to remember what to do in a quarantine situation is to ask yourself: what would a Jovian do? If you eliminate "nuke everything" and "perform a hate crime" from the possible answers, the remainder makes for a nice to-do list of sufficiently paranoid countermeasures.

DCS Test

The list of variables that factor into a true Destroy/Contain/Study assessment are exhaustive. In the field, we make do with a simplified version of the CDC biosafety classifications, revised and expanded just before the organization's destruction in the Fall. These classifications correspond to our designated threat-levels and share the same recommended actions. I'll let you read for yourself. My recruiter was prone to a mnemonic device: "Four or below? Just take it slow. Above and odd? Find the escape pod."

DETECTING EXSURGENT VIRUS AND THREATS

This is the main task of a sentinel and the hardest part of your job. It's also the area in which I have the least to offer you.

The exsurgent virus is adaptive, multi-faceted, and intelligent. Firewall's opposition against it is more an arms race than outright war, but never imagine that means we share equal footing. The only reason transhumanity has survived this long is because exsurgents are just too good at killing us. A full-blown outbreak can burn through a city like New Mumbai so fast that the virus advertises its presence and ends up stopping its own spread, especially since transhumanity has dispersed itself among the stars. The lethality has bought Firewall time to research and adapt countermeasures, but the virus is learning too. Each generation of exsurgent grows subtler than the last. Even as we learn to fight our incomprehensible enemy, it's learning to bypass the fragility that has protected our species thus far.

I won't call the Firewall database of exsurgents useless, but you're only likely to find recognizable strains in the most isolated locales. We suspect repeated outbreaks of the same strain are merely evolutionary throwbacks cut-off from whatever hive intelligence drives the virus onward, and their occurrence grows less frequent every year. Large population centers with numerous, unsecured mesh channels and extensive fabrication capabilities are high-value targets for an exsurgent. It's these habitats where we find a disproportionate number of new strains. In short, it's testing our defenses: inflicting maximum casualties while frustrating our opportunities for intelligence gathering. Statistically, your first run-in with the exsurgent virus is likely to be the first time that strain has ever been encountered, so I can't really give hard-and-fast rules for detection. What I will say is that your proxy and your peers know all this. When it comes to the possibility of exsurgents, most Firewall agents are very forgiving of the shoot-first-ask-later philosophy. You'll know an infection when you see it. Trust your instincts. We do.

The mistake inexperienced sentinels most often make is dismissing other threats to transhumanity. Though outside a single polity's control, Firewall is far from post-political. The beliefs of our agents and the ideological tendencies of our structure sometimes skews otherwise actionable intelligence. Pragmatist sentinels might consider a seed-AI research project as a necessary step to transhuman survival—at least until we end up with another TITAN on our hands. A maverick could deem the hypercorp destabilization of a gift economy inconsequential, but economic collapse and the resulting conflict was the breeding ground in which the exsurgent virus wiped out 95% of our population during the Fall. This is why sentinels typically work in teams and submit their intelligence to diversely staffed proxy servers. Report

frequently and consult often to keep ideological blind spots in check. If you're worried about autonomy, always remember that you're the final arbiter of what actions to take in a mission. Following orders and recommendations can't be enforced in the field, but sentinels shouldn't be surprised when after-action accountability protocols get more stringent as a result.

PANDORA GATE PROTOCOLS

We're getting into the really obscure stuff now. I think it's a mistake to dump all of this on you in one sitting, but I can't log the briefing as complete unless we've covered everything. Stupid structuralist protocols …

Anyway, gatecrashing is really a subject in and of itself. If you're jumping through wormholes with no more training than our little chat, you're either crazy or something has gone seriously wrong. Firewall tries to only task sentinels with experience, access, and the necessary skill sets for missions involving the Pandora gates. In short, gate ops offer high risk and high reward. We only task our best and brightest. As far as sentinels go, getting assigned a gate job either means your i-rep has peaked or your router is out of options.

We try to see to it that every agent that goes on gate missions is familiar with basic crasher protocols. Despite the ideological and economic desires that drive much gate exploration, hypercorps like Gatekeeper practice tactics in line with Firewall quarantine requirements. They know what opening a portal to the TITAN's new playground would mean, and they don't desire forced uploads any more than we do. This means that the conspiracy's guidelines for gatecrashing don't differ much from established doctrine save a few additional priorities.

Organizing a gate hop is a massive undertaking best handled on the server level, but our work means we can never rule out the need for individual action. If for some reason a single cell of sentinels were to fund a gate expedition privately, it's key to secure a sponsor friendly to the organization with a plausible motivation for spending so lavishly. At the minimum, the sponsor needs to be a deniable asset or someone we can trust with the lives of our agents. If a sentinel were to somehow earn enough funds *personally* for an inner system hop or enough rep to cut the line at an autonomist gate, the move would be suicide. Spending that much on gate time without a quality legend will send up red flags in every intelligence organization in the system. You might as well send Ozma an invitation.

The lottery for first-in teams is a better choice if a patron can't be found. We have subverted the random number generator that chooses lottery teams and can get sentinels on the roster on short notice. The problem with first-in teams is that they can't control where they go. While Firewall loves being the first to analyze the potential risks of a new extrasolar destination, being able to target an operation is key to success. Getting on a first-in team, smuggling a secondary blue box to the gate, and then heading to another destination has worked in the past. Some of the "never arrived" and "unexpectedly appeared" spook stories floating around the crasher communities are just our agents peeling off and arriving at mission sites. Not all of them, sadly, but some.

Firewall's priorities in gatecrashing depend on the type of mission. Threat assessment takes precedence during first-in excursions and any other exploration-based mission. Follow first-link protocols to the letter with the one exception of mission recording. A sentinel undercover with an exploration team needs to have enough hacking expertise to subvert the recording gear, the combat skills to sanitize everyone that's seen too much, and the willpower to trigger a killswitch on their stack. The reason is simple: if a location looks profitable enough, transhuman self-preservation can't be trusted to triumph over hypercorp greed. Some "lost" expeditions were actually discoveries made by sentinels embedded with first-in teams. They spoof some quick, mundane death for the team with a hidden code embedded for handlers back in the system. After sending back the altered recordings, sentinels close the gate, kill or recruit members on site, and wait for Firewall to send a specialist team through backchannel gate connections. More than one of our extrasolar research centers operates at gate coordinates perceived as uninhabitable by inner-system polities.

Colonization and resource exploitation missions make up the majority of our infiltration operations out of system. Firewall tries to embed at least one agent in every major outpost we know about. The main goal is to monitor the site for TITAN, exsurgent, exhuman, and xenoarcheological activity, but since large-scale operations are rarely funded until the extrasolar planet is vetted as safe, deep-cover personnel typically end up performing more traditional espionage instead: developing sources, assets, and covers for additional sleeper agents. Gate operators, for instance, are the first positions a deep-cover sentinel will try to subvert. The ability to cut-off gate access enables regime change to bring around a new colony administrations aligned with the Firewall agenda and prevents anyone from heading back with data that might subvert an op. Having an operator on board also allows for a fair amount of petty theft. The occasional shipment back to the solar system that goes missing due to gate malfunction? Sometimes that's just a sleeper agent redirecting the gate coordinates at the last second. How else would we fill our extrasolar resource caches?

Xenoarcheological research sites remain the highest priority of Firewall gate incursions. We cannot allow some exhuman cult or rogue hypercorp to unearth another Fall on the other side of the door. Usually, only the most experienced sentinels are sent on such missions. The stakes are high, resistance fierce, and the assistance far away. Beyond initial threat assessments, research operation infiltrations have a few

standardized parameters. Establishing a scientific sentinel team with a plausible cover story on site is the first task a sentinel faces. The science pursued in exoplanet locales is some of the most well-funded, experimental, and cutting-edge in transhuman history. Understanding the subject matter is beyond most of our field personnel, not to mention identifying hidden dangers. Getting experts on-site is a must.

Sentinels also need to make sure that, even in the event of catastrophe, Firewall gets the intel it needs. We can't afford more "Croatoan" incidents; if an entire settlement goes missing, we must be certain they aren't headed towards home and swarming with exsurgent viruses. Subverting surveillance and establishing an off-site, hidden backup for all vital research information is a major priority. The subtlety required for such an operation and the enormous security presence typical of well-funded extrasolar facilities means only our most capable agents are tasked.

In the rarest instances, crows will designate the research being performed at an extrasolar facility too valuable to ignore *and* too dangerous to allow. In these cases, sentinels in charge of managing dangerous research sites beyond the gate have the unenviable task of smuggling WMDs through the gates. The difficulty of sneaking an antimatter bomb through gate security undetected cannot be overstated, but Firewall sometimes deems redundant failsafes necessary. It should be noted that, if the failsafe is ever detected, protocol says it must be detonated immediately. A secondary attempt at sabotage would be too difficult to perform and, as with everything in Firewall, better safe than sorry.

First Contact Protocols

Firewall has dedicated first-contact teams made up of eminently qualified astrobiologists standing by for rapid deployment in case our organization makes first contact. If a sentinel is transhumanity's first ambassador to an alien race, it means that we had no idea contacting a new sapient was even a possibility. If fate chooses you, being completely unprepared in no way lessens your responsibility; you'll still be partly responsible for shaping transhumanity's future. The gravity of the situation can't be overstated.

The first goal of sentinels making first contact with alien sapience is to conceal their true purpose and identity. It's likely a field agent came in contact with an alien presence in the course of a mission, and we can't assume that the alien is unable to understand our language. We can't even assume they lack mind-reading capabilities. And we certainly can't try to silence an alien organism with violence as we would other breaches of operational security. Secrecy, in general, is the watchword for xeno encounters. Isolate and limit other transhuman contact as much as possible. If, by some astronomical chance, communication is possible, speak of transhumanity only in the vaguest terms. Hostility shouldn't be assumed, but it cannot be ruled out.

Statistically speaking, Firewall's sentinel protocols for such an event are laughably paranoid. What are the chances that a sentinel would make first contact, be able to communicate with the alien, and find a creature that somehow gives a damn about our organization, not to mention our species? It's absurd. There's always the threat of exsurgent infection or worse, however, so we have the guidelines.

Though we plan for hostility and betrayal, confusion is far more likely. The alien might not even be able to perceive a transhuman with its sensory spectrum. It might be as concerned with a transhuman presence as we are with how the cockroaches are faring back on Earth. Divergent evolutionary backgrounds leading to higher-form intelligence mean that even the most simplistic, mathematical communication could fail or be misunderstood.

Thus, Firewall agents get the same advice as any other transhuman in first contact scenarios: say little, withdraw quickly, and bring in experts. The one difference is that sentinels should contact only their router and *no one else*. Exclusive access to a friendly alien intelligence free from the hypercorp and Ozma interests tainting Factor relations would be an unimaginable boon our organization. Your muse has been provided a code packet that is keyed solely for reporting first contact. In the event of a sighting, upload it to the Eye. The code will automatically bump your operation to a higher security classification and bring it to the attention of people prepared to handle such contingencies. It is then the sentinel's task to do absolutely everything possible to keep other transhumans from discovering the alien creatures. If they are a threat, we must protect our species from them, and if they are friends, we must ensure they are Firewall's friends *first*.

Factor Interactions

Beware. As little as we know about Factor biology, we know less about their motivations and origins. There's absolutely no proof that the aliens aren't TITAN-bioengineered organisms meant to monitor transhumanity for their AI masters. They could be responsible for the exsurgent virus, for all we know. I realize these are extreme and conspiratorial theories, but the fact that they cannot be completely disproved should emphasize the need to treat Factors with caution.

More mundane dangers threaten Firewall/Factor relations. Their limited technological trade has thus far occurred exclusively with inner-system polities run by short-sighted, scarcity economies. The rumors of Ozma involvement can't be downplayed, and we have entire scanner divisions dedicated to examining possible connections. All of these concerns come before the inherent misunderstandings bound to occur when communicating with a species that literally *metabolizes* its native language. Do not trust them, and assume the presence of our enemies at any meeting.

Firewall's priorities when communicating with Factors are the same as much of transhumanity:

obtain access to new technology and intelligence. We are particularly interested to learn anything we can about the presumed singularity event that led the species to eschew AI and Pandora gate technology. Obtaining a Factor corpse for dissection would also be a big score, but it's not worth the risk of provoking an inter-species war.

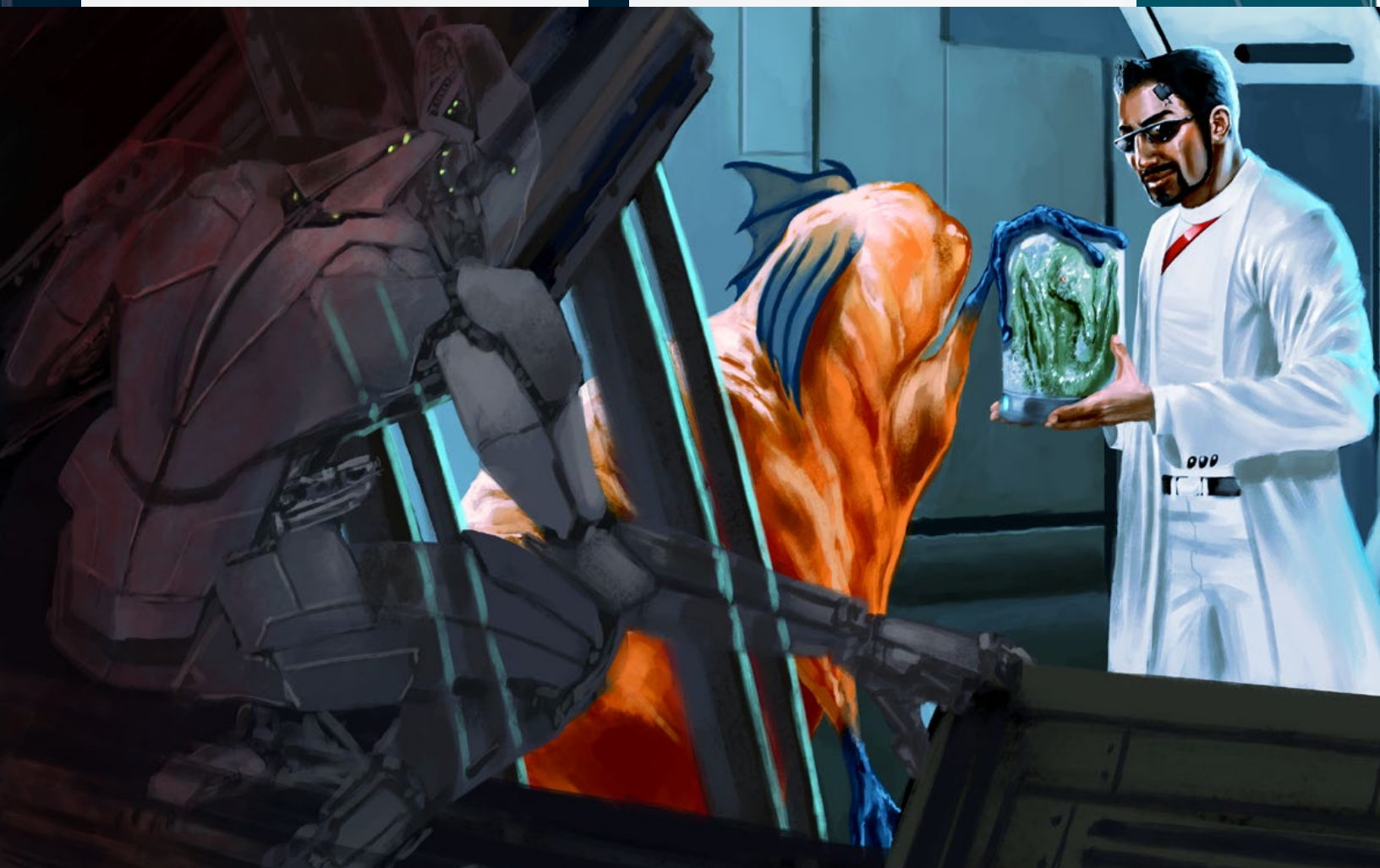
Care must also be taken to protect transhuman and Factor relations. We still do not know what the Factors are capable of technologically or what resources they have on hand in or near our solar system. All evidence points to the likelihood of a Factor base in the Oort Cloud or the capability to engage in faster-than-light travel that does not involve wormhole gates. For these reasons, we cannot risk alienating the Factors or engaging in hostilities with them—nor can we allow any other transhuman parties to take such risks.

MISSION AFTERMATH

You may have napalmed the exsurgent hive, bagged and tagged the baddies, or safely gotten Alien Relic X to the crow lab, but the operation doesn't end there. There are also loose ends to tie down, from sanitizing scenes to resleeving your team mates. Firewall prefers assigning specialized personnel to handle a lot of post-mission tasks, but opsec and staffing shortages mean sentinels might be assigned to run deniability and clean-up on their own missions. Your success at navigating these additional duties is included in the peer-reviewed post-op assessment as well—in fact, they may even be weighed more heavily. While it isn't any fun to pull clean-up after a tough operation, the practice does cut down on the "cowboy syndrome" symptomatic of mavericks. Cover-up as you go and minimize exposure; you never know when you might end up cleaning up your own mess.

Firewall does take care of its own, so you will have support when you return to your life. We go to great lengths in making sure we retrieve our people from hot zones, resleeve them when necessary, and get new IDs to replace burned ones. After all, we have to protect our most valuable assets (that is to say you and every other loyal sentinel) and protect ourselves by trying to limit the number of disgruntled agents. Don't be timid when it comes to asking for help to reintegrate back into your normal life. This most definitely applies to aftercare as well as practical issues.

Sadly, post-traumatic stress is a badge of office for most Firewall agents. Even crows, routers, and scanners are known to develop long-term mental health problems from the stress of our work. Talking to your muse helps, but it isn't always enough. We maintain a small and highly trained group of specialists to help agents recover. Simulspace group therapy with other Firewall personnel and psychosurgery performed by trusted experts are popular options for sentinels. Your local server should list options available to you at no cost.



Capture

If you get caught, Firewall will try to help you, as long as you maintain operational security. Your router should know how the local legal system works and whether hiring a lawyer, bribing the guards, or planning a jailbreak operation will get the best results. In many jurisdictions, credits or rep speak louder than words, so if you're lucky you may be bailed out by an anonymous benefactor within the hour. Some polities aren't so easily bribed, which is where things get more complicated. Trust in Firewall. Our registers will get you out as soon as we can, if it is entirely possible. If you're a suspected spy or terrorist, then you can usually only expect simulspace interrogations, psychosurgery, and cold storage or deletion. In those cases, if we can't get you out, we'll find a way to take you out before they get anything from you. Remember, your backup is secure with us, no matter what, so it won't be the end.

Deniability Operations

Dead morphs, plasma scorches, server-wiping malware, explosions—transhumans aren't willing just to let these things go. Deniability operations aren't so much about covering things up as they are about providing easy answers. Filters and vectors are some of the best-trained operatives in the organization, and the bullshit they manage to sell to the public is scary. These people are ultimately responsible for keeping your ego out of cold storage, so a certain level of deference is expected, but they will accept friendly suggestions from sentinels for which they are covering. If you have moral qualms about some innocent group being blamed for your crimes just because a habitat's jingoism makes them an easy mark, be sure to provide an alternative scapegoat as soon as possible. Filters prefer to collaborate with field personnel on a cover story, and most vectors view special requests as a fun challenge.

Erasure squads, on the other hand, are a kingdom unto themselves. As I said before, they really are a last resort. To give an example, a few erasure squads are equipped with scour rings. This is so they can feed people's stacks into oblivion until complete deniability is achieved. Failing that, they've been known to leave hot zones with a bloody sack of cortical stacks in tow. Don't like the way they do things? Then you shouldn't have called them. The alternative to a total cleanse is letting sentinels take the blame for a blown op, which makes them only slightly more uncomfortable than wholesale murder. As long as Firewall's involvement remains secret and transhumanity survives, the strike teams call it a win. There's nothing in their mission briefing about saving your morph or avoiding war crimes.

Such extreme actions only seem unreasonable if you aren't on an erasure squad. Keep in mind that these people get sleeved all over the universe to fight in the most horrific situations imaginable. For thanks, we dump them back into their mundane identities, tell them to keep quiet, and let them suffer memories so traumatic most would head straight for a memory edit. Erasers have more respect for field operatives than any other role in Firewall, but don't confuse that for friendship. These people will never see sentinels as more than lightweight amateurs. We recruit almost exclusively from Fall military veterans. They know the risks and very much subscribe to the philosophy of "by any means necessary."

Also, remember that we need them more than you. Sentinels know a lot of intel, but their access is still carefully compartmentalized and they're selected due to their ability to evade capture. Meanwhile, an experienced eraser knows where all of Firewall's bodies are buried and is wanted by a half-dozen factions for deletion. The list of crimes filters and vectors have pinned on fall guys over the years is exhaustive, but when your job typically requires you to leave smoking craters in your wake, it's hard for erasers not to leave any trace of their presence. Their deadly results have been blamed on everything from terrorist attacks to criminal organizations to reactor leaks. Regardless of their individual beliefs, erasers swallow the lies for the sake of the mission. This professionalism and loyalty is about all that can be expected when dealing with a squad. They'll get the job done, and even if they don't, the fallout will never reach Firewall. Never forget their effectiveness is total and unreasoning by design. If you have to call them, you should have already been losing control. Don't make things worse for yourself by telling them how to do their job.

Debriefing/Silencing Civilians

For ethical and logistical reasons, we like to keep deniability as much on the Firewall side as possible. It's easier and safer to get a sentinel a new morph than to expunge witnesses. This isn't always possible though. Sometimes we don't know exactly what civilians know and have to find out before further action can be recommended. A debrief is required.

Debrief interviews should be carried out by filters whenever possible. They have the experience and training to ask the right questions while impersonating local authorities. They're also compartmentalized from the operation itself, so there is little danger of being identified as Firewall even by civilians already aware of our existence. If sentinels assist in a debrief, it's likely to be in a standby capacity, distracting real authorities that threaten to blow the filter's cover.

A civilian knows too much if they can confirm the existence of Firewall, identify the primary identities of agents, or possesses knowledge capable of reproducing an x-threat. Meeting any of these requirements warrants action, but strategies vary depending on the individual. If the civilian contributed to the success of the operation and seems sympathetic to the cause, the sentinel can recommend recruitment, in which case the issue is shelved until vetting is complete. If the civilian is deemed a risk by either the sentinel or assigned filter, more extreme action is required. Ideally, the liability is sleeved in an infomorph or some

Showing 5 results for: resignation + Nadiope

To: <Redacted>
From: Makuma *Nadiope*
Subject: *Resignation*
Attached: Final Psychosurgical Consent (Makuma *Nadiope*)
13/08/07 14:12

I am messaging to inform you of my *resignation* from the organization effective no later than six months from this date. The grace period is so that I might be phased out of active projects and minimize any harm my absence may cause. I confess that anything you could to do relieve me of duty sooner would be greatly appreciated. I still support and understand the mission, but the demands of my contributions have grown too emotionally taxing. I will remain friendly in any way I can in my reduced capacity, and I will miss the many friends I've made in our adventures.

Attached you will find my consent form for the mandatory psychosurgery.

Good luck,

Makuma *Nadiope*

To: <Redacted>
From: Makuma *Nadiope*
Subject: *Resignation*
Attached: Final Psychosurgical Consent (Makuma *Nadiope*)
27/02/07 08:45

I am writing to announce my *resignation* from the organization effective immediately. My utility as an operative is spent; the resleevings and psychological damage is too much to bear. We can all agree that my continued service would do nothing but sow dissent amongst the ranks and endanger vital operations. Please do not contact me again under any circumstances.

My consent form is attached.

To: <Redacted>
From: Makuma *Nadiope*
Subject: I'm done
Attached: Final Psychosurgical Consent (Makuma *Nadiope*)
03/11/09 04:02

Operational security?! Now you're concerned about opsec? Fuck. You. I can still hear the screams from your last *secure* operation, shithead. Always with the protocols … here's your goddamn form, okay. Happy? I'm out now. Done. *Resign*ed. You send over the doctor *now* to cut this shit out of my head before I come over there and show you firsthand what those things did to Rawlins.

To: <Redacted>
From: Makuma *Nadiope*
Subject: I trusted you
11/01/10 01:26

He was me, Dishi. He was *me*. I ignored your advice and checked in on Sara. She was sitting across from him, and he was me. He brushed her hair out of her eyes, just like I would. They were eating at our favorite sashimi place. That man was with my ex-wife … but I guess it's just *my* ex-wife, right? His wife now. Or was it always?

Have I *resign*ed before, Dishi? What really happened with my stack retrieval? Did he get out, and I'm just a fucking echo? Want to tell me the truth for once in your damned life?

If you come for me, I'll kill you. Then I'll take your ego. You didn't delete those skills, did you? The ones your precious Firewall found so useful? You've seen what I can do. Stay away.

To: Cleaner Swarms Ltd.
From: <Redacted>
Subject: Biomod ur morph 4 free!!!
Attached: Personnel File (Makuma *Nadiope*)
11/05/10 01:29

Resignation wasn't accepted. You are go for retirement plan. Retirement plan is a go.

Call me when it's done and I'll grab a fresh one out of storage. ♣

kind of cyberbrain. Our psychosurgeon vectors can then attempt mind hacks to eliminate the offending memories. It may also be possible to leverage the target's reputation or criminal record against their silence. Firewall operations tend toward the illegal in even the most liberal of habitats, and that can often lead to situations where civilians aware of our identity face mutually assured destruction if they choose to go public. In some ways, this option is more desirable than memory erasure. Blackmailed civilians can be coerced into providing assistance to future operations. If a liability can be memory-wiped or threatened into silence, the success of the mission depends on eliminating the offending evidence before it can be backed up off-site or in ego storage.

This is the primary reason sentinels are often kept on-site after a mission; filters are quite adept at false flags and misinformation, but they need help when it comes to collecting stacks. Sentinels are responsible for any wetwork while the filters and vectors do their best to cover up their moves. The liability to operational security must be eliminated in terms of evidence and ego, and a plausible motivation needs to be established to deter investigation from any backups or forks. In short, try to make it look like an accident.

It may seem cruel to require sentinels to assassinate civilians they may have come to know during a mission, but it's the best option. Sentinels will certainly take more pains to make a clean kill than erasers would. Furthermore, Firewall's limited resources can't be spent charitably resleeving civilians that saw too much. If the liability doesn't have a backup insurance, the sentinel is allowed to launder

credits or rep through the organization and donate towards the victim's new morph anonymously. Experienced sentinels call it the "guilt tax."

Recruiting New Allies and Agents

Beyond flagging civilians touched by Firewall's operations for recruitment, sentinels usually won't have a hand in the actual recruitment process of new agents. It's a violation of compartmentalization and introduces nepotism into the organization. However, a trusted face may tip the balance in our favor, so this rule is sometimes ignored.

Some transhumans encountered in the course of missions serve as better allies than agents. A crime lord might care nothing for transhumanity's survival, but a desire for profit and access to underground contacts could make it worthwhile to put him in our employ. An XP star might have few useful skills, but an enthusiasm for the cause might serve a burgeoning memetic propaganda campaign for the structuralist clique. Negotiating these "aware-but-don't-care" alliances exposes the organization to an enormous amount of risk and should be reserved for those with proxy status. However, where access to a valuable transhuman asset is fleeting, sentinels can represent Firewall and arrange terms immediately. Just be aware that the sins of allies are shared with those who vouch for them.

Then there are transhumans such as yourself, possessed of the rare combination of placement, skills, and beliefs to serve the conspiracy in battle. If at all possible, resist the urge to mention Firewall, explain its mission, or give the recruit any hint as to what they may be getting into. Sentinels need only notify a proxy of the candidate's potential and say goodbye. Specialized personnel teams will then go about obtaining a fork for simulspace testing. If passed, the candidate gets a briefing like the one you and I are having right now. If they don't, they are none the wiser and can go on with their lives.

After recruitment, every server has their own rules for new agents. In some, you can expect loyalty tests, memory edits, and the like. In others, transparent decision making is shared among all members of the server, with specific rules to prevent abuse of power. In a few servers, they maintain one set of rules for low-rep sentinels and another for high-rep proxies and other experienced agents. You may be a fully trusted agent in a cooperative organization or you may be a martyr who dies over and over for transhumanity's future.

Preventative Measures

Today, sentinels like yourself do the majority of our work, but many of the proxies want to change that. Know the old Earth saying "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure?" In the future, we want to eliminate existential threats before they are actually threats. Some proxies believe that's impossible and a foolish waste of resources, and they may have a point. Who can possibly try to predict what we will find beyond the Pandora gates or if the TITANs will return? Most of us want to try, though, so Firewall devotes a lot of resources towards preventative measures.

Crow Research

Crows engage in research connected to our core mission, which means we have people studying virtually every subject in the universe, no matter how trivial. Some of our people play the latest simulspace games and watch the hottest new XPs to analyze their memetic properties so we can apply their techniques to our own propaganda efforts. In general, most of the work of the crows is broken down into three major categories: anti-TITAN research, disaster response and resiliency, and xeno-studies. If you are an academic type, you may wish to transfer to the crows after a few missions. Talk to your router if a life of researching the extinction of our species interests you. However, every agent can benefit from the crows.

The mystery of the TITANs has yet to be solved, but we're in the best position to unravel it. Firewall maintains several dedicated gatecrashing teams who search for clues about their current location. We also keep tabs on scavengers and anti-TITAN fighters who patrol quarantine zones and hotspots like New Mumbai, the TQZ on Mars, and Iapetus. Crows collate and analyze their findings to create new theories about their position. Some of us want to shut down all of the scavengers and anti-TITAN war bands we find because they risk spreading exsurgent infections to the rest of transhumanity. However, it is currently believed the intel we receive from them is worth the risk.

We have learned quite a bit since the Fall about the TITANs, including interesting leads about their final destination. Finding out where they went is only part of the puzzle though. Our progress in the last year has come to a crawl. Lately, some of the crows have come to the conclusion that our only real avenue of investigation left is Earth. We know so little about its current status and what the TITANs left behind there that some think that leaving it untouched is a strategic mistake. Perhaps they will launch large-scale expeditions in the future. For now, though, the crows are more focused on building better tools for our people to use.

Crow engineers are constantly designing new technology to deal with the TITANs. These projects tend to be fairly exotic, as improvements on conventional weapons have so far produced minimal returns on investment. Our engineers are now looking at things like strangelets, weaponized antimatter deployment systems, and reverse-engineering alien technology. Software exploits and hacks for exsurgent variants are also developed. New anti-TITAN weapons are frequently given out to sentinels for field testing. If you're brave, ask the crows on the Eye for new toys.

Start Æther Jabber
Active Members: X

Proxy P: You need to shut down or retask the Colander operation. I'm linking some alternate assets that could fill in and new action plans with feasibility grades within the acceptable parameters.

Proxy B: The fuck?! How do you even know about Colander, Mel? We aren't even in the same server anymore.

Proxy P: You're right. I'm not. I'm working ego backups now. I just pulled Leti's last backup and instantiated her infomorph.

Proxy B: I'm going to be as clear as I can about this: stay out of my ops and get off this channel. You-know-who has probably already flagged us both for violating protocol like this. If I weren't staring at the encryption with my own eyes, I'd be submitting you for loyalty tests and peer review right now. I still might.

Proxy P: It's not like I was fishing, Saul. It was a routine follow-up. The scanners thought up a new angle on that Fresh Kills fiasco from a few years back and we had to do another debrief. She was the only stack we got back, remember?

Proxy B: Okay. So? Ask your questions and put her back in cold storage.

Proxy P: She could barely form sentences, you asshole. I was amazed she was even still on our rosters. I'd thought we'd interrogated and deleted her ego two years when those Ozma rumors popped up. But lo and behold, my muse finds her waiting for me in the bank after one search. You just left her embedded there, didn't you? You bastard. After everything she did for us.

Proxy B: Cut the holier-than-thou shit, Mel. She volunteered. And you keep talking like I've forgotten who I'm talking to. Do you, of all people, really want to have the ends-don't-justify-means conversation with me?

Proxy P: Do you even know the shit they're having her do? Do you?

Proxy B: No. I don't. I don't want to, and you shouldn't either. I compartmentalized it out of my hands months ago.

Proxy P: Saturn's balls, Saul, you just handed her off? She couldn't go five minutes without breaking into sobs. If we'd sleeved her in flesh, she would have been sweating and flushed the entire time. There's no way she can maintain her cover with those animals much longer. You're risking the whole organization leaving her under that long. Not to mention what you're doing to Leti. She's got signs of depression, neural damage, PTS—

Proxy B: I know, Mel! Okay! I get it. It's a shitty situation. But what am I supposed to do? It's not like those psychos she's in with declare their blood money on income taxes. The credits she siphons off in a week can fund entire operations and remain completely untraceable. I'm not living in your brinker utopia. This is the inner system. If I have to task some spec-ops ninja to kill a baby TITAN in the womb, what good is our action hero if there isn't enough in the budget to sleeve him?

Proxy P: I get it. I really do. The greater good spiel. But it's not enough to make her watch and record anymore. She's had to start … participating. They're making her do it now, too. To kids. It's the only way to maintain her cover.

Proxy B: …

Proxy P: I mean, the backup is over four months old. She says it's because of limited transmission windows, but for all we know she could already be dead.

Proxy B: I tried, okay? Multiple times.

Proxy P: What?

Proxy B: I tried to get her out on three separate occasions. The server voted it down every time. Too valuable an asset, they said. I passed the op off because I couldn't bear to watch anymore.

Proxy P: God … then what do we do? Just wait for her to snap and blow her cover?

Proxy B: Basically, yeah. We'd never send anyone in there without a kill switch. If she's exposed, she'll do her damage and leave no traces. She's a good soldier.

Proxy P: Fuck opsec—what about Leti? There's a person in there. They've broken her, Saul.

Proxy B: I guess that's where you come in. You've got access to the archives, right? She went in a little over two years ago. When the time comes, do us a favor and delete everything after that point. Let her start over.

Proxy P: And what do I say when she asks about the continuity loss?

Proxy B: You tell her to be grateful for small mercies … and that I'm sorry. ♣

You could earn a lot of rep by field testing new tech. It is a risky strategy, though, as experimental weapons tend to fail in high-pressure situations.

The TITANs are not our only concern, though. The Fall might not have been preventable, but the damage could have been mitigated. Many crows focus their work on ways to minimize losses in a disaster through better response and increased resilience in society as a whole. This is a broad topic, so everything from improved farcasting technology to raising the minimum wage of indentured Martian workers is studied. The majority of funding in this area goes to "safe" topics like medical and infrastructure technology research. A great deal of this work is then channeled through the argonauts, so every transhuman society can benefit from it—and that includes everyone, even the Jovians and ultimates. On occasion, some sentinels have stolen hypercorp proprietary research data, which wound up in the hands of crow researchers. Oddly enough, that data would turn up in anonymous open-source projects released to autonomist mesh networks. If you are ever in a position to acquire knowledge that could benefit all of transhumanity, snag it and send it to the Eye. We can find the best use for it.

The Pandora gates and the Factors are major concerns, so many crows focus their time on them. Crows are not supposed to go into the field because their heads are full of very valuable information. Unfortunately, xeno studies are best done in the field, usually through a Pandora gate. Bringing samples back from an exoplanet is a logistical nightmare. We do get a lot of usable data from gatecrashing argonauts and the Love and Rage Collective, but the hypercorps try to keep their discoveries secret.

Decryption Complete
Private Key Accepted
Étienne, your cover is blown.
The safehouse is compromised.
Oversight has an APB out on you.
Get out now.
Rendezvous at the usual place.

MONITORING HOTSPOTS AND INDIVIDUALS OF INTEREST

Scanners keep tabs on every known existential threat in the system. If it's an existential threat, why don't we just nuke it? In some cases, we've tried and failed. The TITAN quarantine zones are resistant to weapons of mass destruction and risk spreading the contamination further if bombarded. We do not want to launch chunks of New Mumbai into space and collide with who knows what. Monitoring hot spots is invaluable. Our systems use a combination of robots, passive sensors, and embedded informants in scavenger and TITAN fighter communities. Information is collated and analyzed by scanners to assess potential threats. We have spotted potential infectious vectors fleeing the quarantine zones and stopped them before they reached population centers. That alone justifies our work. Our understanding in fighting TITAN war machines has improved by studying them in their "natural habitat," as it were. Given that we cannot destroy them, Firewall's decision to set up permanent monitoring systems was an easy call to make.

The decision to monitor certain exhumans was not so easy to make. We could wipe out every exhuman and singularity seeker we find, but it is better if we watch some of them. They lead us to other exhumans and their hideouts. Knowing when to let a target walk and when to stop them is hard; mistakes are inevitable. Given the difficulty in monitoring them remotely, the proxies have felt it necessary to send in undercover sentinels in certain high-risk communities.

UNDERCOVER WORK

Technically, every sentinel is an undercover agent, but some are more undercover than others. If your cover is blown when you work as an argonaut researcher or as an Extropian contractor, it is inconvenient and possibly dangerous. Blowing your cover if you're a triad enforcer or Jovian diplomat is an excellent way to get killed and tortured in simulspace interrogations for the rest of time. Some of our most dedicated sentinels go as full-time undercover agents in the most dangerous parts of the solar system. We are talking about exhumans, Nine Lives and other soul traffickers, various terrorist groups, and the Jovians. It is more dangerous than gatecrashing or erasure squad work because you risk your life, mental health, and morality. Every sentinel has to make tough calls, but the deep cover agents have to become as monstrous as their targets. Purging the universe of an exhuman mad scientist is brutal, but it feels good when you win. Infiltrate that scientist's lab as an assistant for a month and you will be ready for the psychosurgeons to scrub your mind. Some of our sentinels aren't even that lucky.

While the costs of undercover work are very high, the payoffs are worth it. Receiving actionable intel before the bad guys act is extremely rare, but defusing

a WMD before detonation justifies nearly any cost we pay. If you are chosen for a mission where you are asked to prevent an attack before it happens, know that it is most likely the result of undercover work. Passive surveillance seldom leads to big breaks like undercover work does. Our pre-emptive strikes are also commonly based on intel gathered from undercover sources.

Pre-emptive Strikes

Taking out an existential threat before it becomes one usually means launching a large-scale pre-emptive strike. Because we do not have an active military, Firewall prefers industrial sabotage and other measures that can be explained away. Instead of an erasure squad, a small team of swarmanoid engineers can cause a station's reactor to meltdown or detonate the engines of a ship. Collateral damage is almost certain, as most habitats and ships have innocent civilians as well as legitimate targets. In some cases, taking them all out at once is a mercy, especially if it prevents an exsurgent outbreak. It won't always be as clear as that so use your conscience to guide you when you are in the field. You are first accountable to yourself.

Assuming you have agreed to the strike, there are best practices to follow. The best strikes are instant, unavoidable, and explainable by other means. By unavoidable, I mean strikes that the target cannot hope to defend against, like large explosions or hull breaches. An ambush with plasma rifles and seeker rifles does not quality as an instant and unavoidable attack. You have to think big. Habitats are fragile places, so be creative and ruthless. Program a shuttle to ram into the mother station at high speeds. Use a maker to manufacture a batch of nerve gas and introduce it into the life support system. Attacks on multiple systems at the same time are even better. Routers will usually provide assistance for important missions like pre-emptive strikes, so if they don't, make sure the Eye knows about it. If your router can't provide adequate support for an important mission, like taking an entire habitat out, then you need to speak up and make them accountable.

Internal Security

All right, I've already talked about some of the things we aren't allowed to talk about. Just because you're in doesn't mean you're completely in, know what I mean? The perception of our existence qualifies as an attack to outsiders, but we have to take more nuanced methods for establishing the trustworthiness of our agents.

Need to Know and Compartmentalization

The key to maintaining an illegal conspiracy is not perfect tradecraft, but compartmentalization. Even though we maintain a private network, it is imperative that no one agent, from sentinel to proxy, is capable of bringing down more than a handful of operatives and missions if they are captured. Don't take offense; this is not a question of loyalty or willpower. Psychosurgeons can cut all of that out of your brain. In order to keep Firewall safe, every agent is asked only to learn what they need to know in order to complete their current mission. This does not mean we erase your memories after every mission. Firewall needs the expertise you've gained from experience. You may be asked to allow psychosurgeons to tweak your memories when infiltrating highly dangerous areas, however, enabling the alteration or deletion of certain sensitive information. For example, we could change the names and identifying information you learned about other Firewall agents you served with, so they will be safe if you are captured. This is usually a voluntary operation, so you may keep your memories intact if you wish. In general, we do not edit the minds of our sentinels without permission unless they are incapable of giving informed consent, but there are exceptions in certain cases.

Need-to-know also means that you do not get too curious about operations you are not involved in. Other sentinels may refer to past missions, but unless it is directly relevant to the task at hand, ignore them. If you feel as though your current mission is connected to another Firewall operation, pass a query to your vector and wait for a response. Do not try

Big Guns

Posted by: *Anonymous*

It is important for you to know that our most powerful weapons are not our erasure squads, but our cutting-edge computational resources. I cannot go into details, but I am authorized to mention that we have access to some of the best technology transhumanity has ever produced. I say this because you will hear rumors on the Eye or through chatting with other sentinels about the exact nature of our capabilities. You'll hear that we have caged TITANs working for us or that we found computronium on an exoplanet or some other ridiculous conspiracy theory. I cannot tell you what these resources are, but they are safe and, without them, we would have never recovered from the Fall. If that answer does not satisfy you, earn our trust. Work your way up through the ranks, pass the peer reviews and loyalty tests, and eventually you will find out the truth. Of course, most agents do not obsess over our covert digital assets. They understand the need to compartmentalize. After all, you will seldom, if ever, have the chance to draw upon these resources.

In practical terms, our servers are not accessible to sentinels because they are dedicated to help fulfill our strategic goals. As I mentioned earlier, our scanners spend a great deal of effort trying to see the future. This not only requires the best possible data, but the best possible simulation models and the processing power necessary to run the models. We have spent a great deal of effort into building useful predictive mapping solutions to detect the next existential threat before it strikes and without the need of undercover agents. We have not yet achieved that goal, but with every bit of data we receive from sentinels, we get closer. ♣

to investigate past actions on your own if it is at all possible. Ignorance is bliss.

Comms, Records, and Archives

Good communication and data retention policy is vital for a long career in the Firewall. Vectors will give you specific protocols on a per-mission basis for contacting your router, and you should have extensive documentation on using the Eye. Follow those rules to the letter—they should stop eavesdropping from interested parties. However, you might find the need to communicate with other sentinels in the field using methods that will allow for surveillance: public or insecure mesh channels, actual talking, open radio communications, etc. Try to meet with fellow sentinels in your team before the mission begins to establish a good communication system. At the very least, establish codewords for important elements in your mission. Talking about exhumans or neo-primitive terrorists over an open channel is a good way to get the attention of local law enforcement agencies. Use of more sophisticated ciphers like steganography is only recommended if you have actual expertise in the field. Bad ciphers can be easily detected by automated surveillance systems, which leads to unwanted attention from law enforcement or Oversight. This is true even in autonomist habitats. We've blown more than one mission when a self-righteous hacker intercepted and deciphered messages passed between sentinels and then publicly broadcast it on the local mesh as a public service announcement.

Data retention is clearly a problematic issue, but Firewall's institutional memory is invaluable. Submit detailed after-action reports, with as much raw data as you can, especially XPs of your perspective. You are allowed to maintain your own records as long as you follow our policies, namely that you list what you are keeping and how you are storing them. In case something happens to you, we need to be able to retrieve or destroy those records. There are certain best practices that must be followed when keeping personal records of missions: every file must follow stringent encryption protocols, they must be purged of personal identifying information of other Firewall personnel, and they must be stored off the mesh. Overall, it is better to give everything to Firewall and let them handle the record-keeping. However, some agents become obsessive over their work, analyzing their performance between missions, so we have developed our policies to accommodate their quirks.

The Firewall archives are guarded by the best counter-intrusion systems ever built, so accessing them is not done on a whim. Most of our old mission reports are not stored on the Eye, but upon request, certain ones may be uploaded so sentinels can study them when appropriate. When making a request for material from the archives, make it as specific and compelling as possible. Everything on the Eye is at risk for possible viewing by our enemies. We do not take requests lightly. In fact, it is safe to assume that any request will put you under scrutiny. Expect some questions at your next peer review over it.

Peer Review

Show me a traditional organization and I'll show you how the moles get in. Pay structure, hierarchy, and nepotism are the core structural deficiencies by which intelligence organizations have played each other for centuries. Firewall's autonomist leanings shaped an interdependent, horizontal workflow that eliminates many of the blind spots upon which traditional espionage depends. Total autonomy is equally susceptible to enemy infiltration, however, and harbors the added risk of concealing fringe or splinter ideologies. To bridge the gap and ensure internal security, Firewall uses the Eye to facilitate frequent peer reviews.

Peer reviews are conducted by a mix of Firewall personnel in varying roles. The reviewers may know each other from the same cell or server, but they can also be tasked into anonymous work groups. The panel reviews all the recorded data in a field operation's after-action report, assesses performance according to the rubric of mission factors, flags inconsistencies, and broadcasts conclusive recommendations to the server or across the entire Eye. In addition to the big role peer review boards play in establishing a sentinel's rep score, they remain our primary tool for finding and targeting leaks within the organization.

Peer reviews are triple-blind: the field operatives don't know who is on the review board, the reviewers don't know the identity of the field operatives, and neither party knows when a review will be called for. A cell working out of Uranus could be tasked with reviewing data on a Mercury op three years later, or a Martian group of scanners might get tasked to scrutinize mission data coming from their own city in real-time. The randomness and anonymity of the process makes it nearly impossible to corrupt. Disinterested parties make objective assessments, knowing full well that they, too, will one day undergo judgment. In instances where peer review conclusions are uncertain or disputed, the controversy may warrant delaying the findings from entering the after-action report. This isn't out of a desire for your well-being, though. If evidence suggests you might be a mole, we won't be announcing anything that might give you time to run. Confusion in peer-review recommendations get resolved immediately through loyalty tests.

Loyalty Tests

Aside from peer reviews, you can expect your loyalty to Firewall to be tested multiple times during the course of your career. Scanners and vectors watch sentinels for signs of bad behavior, like odd communications with unknown parties or unaccounted periods of time between missions. A sentinel who gets flagged for behavior will be investigated by other agents, usually other sentinels if a blind peer review isn't available. If the behavior cannot be explained, it

will be kicked up to a router. At that point, things become serious. Expect to be called in for interviews or have your latest backup interrogated in simulspace. Asyncs may be called in to read your mind. The investigation will not stop until the truth is uncovered to their satisfaction. Sentinels who pass an investigation describe it as a special kind of hell, but I know that it works. This is not done lightly, so be as transparent as possible with Firewall about your off-duty time and activities. We do not care about your drug habits, affairs, or kinks, unless they can be used as blackmail against you. This brings me to my next point: the actual loyalty tests.

Proxies have to be paranoid about the sentinels they use, so loyalty tests are frequently used to assess sentinels. Some proxies go for simple encounters between missions. Someone tries to blackmail you about an embarrassing secret in exchange for trivial information about a Firewall mission you were in. Failure to immediately report the blackmailer results in a failure. Others are more elaborate, like false missions that reveal past Firewall actions in a negative light. Changing your opinion about Firewall for earlier mistakes also results in a failure of the test. No matter how the test is designed, you will be judged on a pass/fail basis. A pass indicates you can be trusted and things continue to operate normally. Failure has very dramatic and real penalties. Your rep will be hosed and the proxy may recommend you go in for a "training mission," which usually means a grueling indoctrination of basic tradecraft principles for weeks at a time. That's if your proxy likes you and thinks you made a stupid mistake. If your failure is deemed to be the result of a deep personal flaw or a lack of commitment to Firewall, you may be encouraged to go into voluntary psychosurgery to correct those flaws. Rejecting the surgery results in a black mark on your personal record. You may be left in limbo, unable to leave Firewall and unable to contribute to the organization. You may be sent on the worst missions and given no access to information. You may be exiled to a distant exoplanet or outer system habitat. Running or attempting to leave Firewall after a failed loyalty test results in other sentinels being sent after you.

We are not an exploitative hypercorp that demands loyalty but gives none in return, though. Agents who perform for Firewall will be protected. Aside from the safest backup servers in the galaxy, we also keep an eye out for all our people. The exact circumstances of our help depends on your situation, but you never have to worry about keeping a job between missions. You won't go hungry or homeless, though a Firewall-given job may not be pleasant. More than one former hypercorp rising star has wound up as a maintenance engineer in the Titanian Commonwealth. Helping friends and family is also possible, but we can't make promises. It is permissible to call in favors over the Eye for help in those areas. Many sentinels are glad to help their comrades in arms. Just expect reciprocal favors in the future when you have to help their families.

EYEWIKI SEARCH: OPS AND CASES

Firewall deals with an endless variety of one-off threats, but where a given threat is large in scope, an ongoing operation is created to deal with it. Operations are also spawned to handle ongoing threat deterrents that are oriented towards a class of threats more than specific x-risks. Likewise, proxies of a more policy-oriented bent plan continually for Firewall's response to a variety of doomsday scenarios. These response plans are referred to as cases to differentiate from ongoing operations, and include a variety of research, contingency, and survival initiatives, many of them sponsored by the backup faction.

For both cases and operations, one server is tasked with coordination; in most cases, this becomes the server's primary project. For larger operations, multiple servers may actually cooperate, each handling different aspects.

Firewall uses the old intel agency convention of referring to cases and operations by code words. This may seem archaic, but Firewall produces quite a bit of mission documentation that refers to other operations. Code word references prevents the interception of a single document from compromising multiple missions. ♣

ONGOING FIREWALL OPERATIONS

Posted By: Stitch, Router <Info Msg Rep>
Classification:
TOP SECRET / ULTRAVIOLET EYES ONLY

Greetings. I'm breaking protocol by assembling this list, but frankly routers with our clearance could use some more reference material. With our compartmentalization, we're too often recreating the wheel or stepping on each other's toes. Those of us directing ops need to be clued in a bit more to the bigger picture, to more strategically deploy our assets. Most of us have been involved with many of these ops in some form or another anyway, and this list doesn't provide much in the way of details that might compromise operational details. It is also by no means complete, but it does provide an overview of many ongoing projects.

If you're upset I'm sharing this list, well, I refer you to the maverick slogan: bite my shiny metal ass.

CASE ASTURIAS BLACK FLAG

ASTURIAS BLACK FLAG is Firewall's response plan for a full scale invasion of transhuman space by the TITANs. The plan is a work in progress, its scope greatly constrained by Firewall's lack of knowledge regarding many key facts about the seed AIs. Despite these deficiencies, the Ozymandias server runs ongoing scenarios with their latest data and maintains a number of contingencies in place, whether the TITANs re-emerge on Earth or one of the containment zones, launch an attack via the Pandora gates, or suddenly emerge throughout an infiltrated transhuman space. Their contingencies include possibilities such as large-scale strikes on infected targets, evacuation of the solar system, and the destruction

or blocking off of Pandora gates to seal off extrasolar colonies from infection. This project is particularly reliant on intel gathered from Operation GHOST RADIO and Operation ERRANT ECCENTRIC. Both are excellent, if incomplete, sources of information on TITAN capabilities and weaknesses.

OPERATION AXON VULGAR

Though kept under wraps from much of Firewall, this initiative has the support of many conservatives. It seeks to investigate the nature of Watts-MacLeod infection and develop both cures and defenses. Their research ranges from effective psi detection and countermeasures to tracking known asyncs for the purpose of elimination should Firewall change its mind about their x-risk potential. Rumors of async abduction and experimentation are categorically denied, though the server has admitted to monitoring the research performed on asyncs by other organizations without intervening to help the victims. A subproject of this operation works to track down and either monitor, eliminate, or recruit members of the Lost Generation.

CASE BERSERKER VOID

The crows behind this project, inherited from various pre-Fall studies, take a detailed look at the (partly answered) Fermi Paradox question: why haven't we encountered more intelligent life? In this vein, they look at various "Great Filter" hypotheses, which suggest that something in the process of evolutionary growth tends to wipe out new civilizations. More specifically, they look at the evidence recovered from various extinct species that we have discovered via the gates and ask, "What wiped them out—and could the same happen to us?" Though this project takes a more theoretical bent than most, the server does occasionally commission new gatecrashing ops to look into various lines of inquiry.

OPERATION CARIBOU ABYSS

CARIBOU ABYSS is the umbrella term for a multitude of smaller operations involving Saturn's moon Iapetus. These sub-projects include mapping the moon's interior, locating exsurgent and TITAN machine pockets, monitoring the research efforts by Titanians and other parties, understanding the exact nature of Iapetus and the TITAN's efforts here, and establishing contingency plans on dealing with any x-risks that originate here, up to and including the destruction of Iapetus itself.

OPERATION CENOTAPH

CENOTAPH maintains surveillance over the devastation of Earth. In addition to tracking breaches of the interdiction zone, the server closely monitors and analyzes ongoing activity on Earth, particularly any signs that preparations are underway for further attacks. A major chunk of this operation's intel comes from taps that have been strategically placed within the interdiction network itself, subverting their defenses and intercepting the surveillance satellite feeds. They are also known to watch over reclaimer

Posted by: Yemaja, Register <Info Msg Rep>

Firewall is kicking off a lot of flops on its processors, but it's not omniscient or omnipresent. There are gaps in its coverage, research it should be conducting, and developing situations to which it should be playing closer attention. The organization's resources are already strained. To make up for this, some operations rely heavily on siphoning data from other entities who are already in-the-know or who are capable of throwing more resources around. These sources are tricky, as they rely heavily on vector oversight, and they are easily cut off if discovered, leaving Firewall blind. Other operations are little more than side projects maintained by one or two proxies while they are not busy with other affairs, meaning that crucial data sometimes slips past or Firewall is not able to muster the resources to respond to a situation until far later. In truth, some situations are just too large to effectively monitor. It is beyond the scope of Firewall, for example, to track the production and use of antimatter throughout the solar system. So we grit our teeth and pick our battles … and hope to Jupiter we picked the right ones. ♣

and scrapper groups, using infiltrators to keep an eye on their activities. CENOTAPH operatives are very territorial when it comes to other Firewall operations involving Earth, even going so far as to intervene into attempts to escape Earth because they did not deem the operation "safe."

CASE CLOSE CONTACT

Should the TITANs, Factors, or an unknown alien species launch an attack on the solar system from deep space, Case CLOSE CONTACT has the plans in place to (hopefully) derail it. Their research focuses on monitoring the Oort Cloud for signs of an alien fleet, keeping tabs on the space-based military assets of various transhuman factions, and scenarios involving combat around various solar system bodies.

OPERATION CLOUD DRAGON

For the last several years, a particularly noxious and well-organized exhuman group known as the Empusae has been active throughout the solar system. This particular exhuman outfit has been assigned a higher risk rating due to their stated intent to conquer certain transhuman habitats and use the residents as chattel. Though they have not yet taken much public action, they are known to be laying the groundwork for a major operation behind the scenes. CLOUD DRAGON has been tracing their movements, interfering when possible, and doing everything it can to erase this threat before they bring any of their plans to fruition.

CASE DULLAHAN

Among the various catastrophes that Firewall investigates, some proxies remain concerned about Firewall's ability to respond quickly and decisively in an emergency—and possibly apocalyptic—scenario. Firewall's decentralized structure means the organization often takes weeks if not months to make decisions with the input of all of the proxies. Case DULLAHAN prepares for an eventuality where time is short. Under certain explicit contingency conditions, this project plans to establish a temporary Firewall Council that can act with authority, directing Firewall's servers and assets so as to best respond to the scenario at hand. Though the structuralist server behind this project has laid the groundwork, it is important to note that the conditions enabling Case DULLAHAN to spring into action have not yet been voted on or decided by Firewall as a whole. Debate over this operation remains ongoing, as certain autonomist parties remain reluctant to initiate it, given the potential it could be used by infiltrating parties to destroy Firewall from within.

CASE ELDRITCH WARD

Since the Fall, understanding and developing defenses against the exsurgent virus has been a top priority for Firewall. Of particular interest is its origins—some of the crows with ELDRITCH WARD are now convinced it is not of TITAN design. The servers contributing to this project have also worked to quietly distribute many of their countermeasures to non-Firewall groups over the years, to better strengthen transhumanity's defenses as a whole. This server is always interested to receive reports and samples on new exsurgent encounters—live specimens being preferred, assuming they can be handled safely.

OPERATION ERRANT ECCENTRIC

The TITANs may very well not be the only seed AIs that transhumanity has spawned—or that it will spawn. ERRANT ECCENTRIC follows up on clues—some of them dating back to before the Fall—that we may have other ASIs in our midst. It also investigates groups that are actively or unwittingly creating new superintelligences. The computer science and neuroscience crows in this server take care to analyze the threat potential of other massive intelligence growth possibilities, including transhuman intelligence augmentation. Cognite is one of this operation's main targets, and the servers behind this project have spent significant resources in getting agents inside the corp.

Recently, some scanners working with ERRANT ECCENTRIC have been tracking a group of AGIs known as "sybils" that are believed to be either working with an ASI or seeking to create one.

CASE FERAL MORAINE

FERAL MORAINE is Firewall's plan for responding to an attack on Martian cities emanating from the White

Zone at the center of the TQZ. The options considered in this planning include asteroid bombardment, antimatter strikes, defending and/or destroying the space elevator, and even evacuating and interdicting Mars in the same way as Earth. Though it focuses on an outbreak from the TQZ, FERAL MORAINE simulations also consider attacks emanating from elsewhere on Mars, including major population centers.

Operation Forced Retirement

This backup-sponsored op focuses on building bunkers, refuges, and vaults in far-flung extrasolar locales, so that transhumanity still has a chance at survival even should some new threat arise and wipe most of us out.

Operation Fulgent Termite

FULGENT TERMITE is an operation recently established to monitor remnants of the former crime syndicate-turned-exsurgent annihilation cult known as the White Khanhs.

Operation Fumigant

Recently assembled, Operation FUMIGANT's role is to seek out and expose/destroy a network of exsurgent sleepers in positions of authority on Luna. Details are very much need-to-know at the moment, but rumor is that they are on the cusp of exposing some respected Lunar figureheads.

Operation Gehenna Forty

This operation keeps tabs on extrasolar colonies that have gone missing and actively tries to track them down and determine what happened to them.

Operation Ghost Radio

The purpose of GHOST RADIO is to track down and identify the current location of the TITANs. Though part of the project focuses on Earth (and the rest of the solar system) to ascertain that no TITANs remain there, GHOST RADIO primarily analyzes on extrasolar traces the TITANs have left behind. More recently, this project has steered into investigating a potential relationship between the TITANs and a theorized older alien civilization, possibly responsible for building the Pandora gates.

Operation Glass Lich

The goal of operation GLASS LICH is to penetrate the activities of various influential oligarchs, with the intent of monitoring their ambitions and activities. Condemned as a thinly-disguised anarchist plot by some proxies, the justification for this op posits that the accumulated wealth and experience of oligarchs grants them unprecedented influence over transhumanity's future, which could conceivably become an x-risk.

Operation Ice Nine

The physicists at ICE NINE investigate x-risks posed by research into various types of advanced physics. They poke their beaks into everything from strange matter and wormhole studies to femtotech and iron-bombing the sun. They maintain an ongoing risk assessment of various types of research, occasionally deploying scanners, vectors, or even sentinels to investigate potential dangers.

Case Iron Wind

Case IRON WIND dedicates itself to studying and preparing for the prospects of various self-replicating ecophagy scenarios (so-called grey goo and green goo). Their emphasis is on developing countermeasures, particularly defensive nanoswarms. Most of their current research involves potential outbreaks on Mars, but some crows also investigate the implications of ecophagy on various exoplanets. One of this operation's long-standing projects examines the impact of various TITAN nanoswarms on Earth and the prospect of defeating them.

Operation Kudzu

Initiated by the backup faction, Operation KUDZU is focused on ensuring, beyond any doubt, the long term survival of transhumanity. Taking inspiration from the virulent and invasive plant species, this operation seeks to establish "seed drops" on every single exoplanet transhumanity visits. Each seed drop is equipped with a nanohive, starting feedstock, and cache of egos and blueprints, all encased within a protected shell. Gatecrashing teams are encouraged to bury these deeply in isolated areas. In the event that transhumanity is wiped out, these seeds are instructed to activate after 10,000 years, construct a nanofabber and material-scrounging drones, then build a number of cases for sleeving egos, thus establishing the beachhead for a new colony. The server managing this operation makes sure that Firewall teams going through the gates carry these seeds and also invents ways to convince non-Firewall operatives to plant these under false pretenses.

Operation Lone Wolves

This project is the focal point for Firewall's investigations into astrobiology (and by extension, xenoarcheology and astrosociology). The server running this case is the one many sentinels turn to when they need help identifying or handling alien species. They were also the ones responsible for establishing Firewall's first contact protocols—and are on call should a Firewall team encounter a new alien civilization.

A sub-project of this operation, **Case EXCESSION**, operates as a think-tank devoted to what are considered "outside context problems"—when a species such as transhumanity, without warning, encounters another civilization or entity that is so technologically advanced or otherwise superior that it cannot even fully understand the threat posed by this contact, much less defend against it. As many aboriginal populations discovered when strange men arrived on boats with guns, horses, and new diseases, such encounters are typically fatal. While theorizing helpful responses

Start Æther Jabber
Active Members: 2

- All told, it looks like we have a couple of thousand egos here. Now, the question is: what do we do with them?
- Any idea where they came from?
- All over. This particular slave trader was pulling them in from a lot of sources. Some are infugees, in cold storage since the Fall. Others were forknapped, mostly by shady egocasters, but a few were murdered and stack-popped or thieved by other means. A few hundred were bought cheap from a corp indenture overseer making a fast buck on the side. There are even a few dozen marked as rejects from an AGI programming lab.
- OK, first, run the IDs against the missing-ego registries. Maybe we can reunite someone with family they lost during the Fall. For the rest … well, I'll ask around, maybe we can find an autonomist hab willing to take them. Before you do any of that, though, copy them all and send 'em to [REDACTED] and [REDACTED].
- Copy all of them? What are these operations? KUDZU and LONG SHOT?
- Yep, all of them. I'm not entirely sure—my clearance isn't high enough. If I were to speculate, I'd guess they were backup projects. Y'know, packing egos away for the long haul, in case our species ever needs to be resurrected.
- So we're just storing copies of people without their knowledge? Against their will?
- What are you going to do? Have them sign an NDA? Ask for volunteers? I imagine most folks will be happy to find out they've been archived and saved. If they aren't, well, they can stay in storage.
- Can you imagine that? Waking up with a 10,000-year case of lack? Finding out transhumanity was long gone? But your lottery ticket was punched and you were chosen to start over? What a mindfuck.
- Let's hope we never let it get to that point then, eh?

THE ETHICS OF SURVIVAL

Posted By: Conrik Tombs, Crow, Case MYSTERY

[Begin Excerpt] … There's a philosophy problem called the "trolley problem" that applies here. An out-of-control trolley train rushes down the tracks where it will kill five people. You can flick a switch, however, sending the trolley onto another track, where it will kill just one person. Do you allow the incidental death of one to save five others? Anyone who's been on the sort of mission where you have to make a hard choice knows this problem: kill one to save thousands, sacrifice the few to save the many. It's at the heart of the justification for triage or forgiving the accidental death. It's not hard to see that sacrifice as sad but necessary.

But there's a related philosophy problem. In order to save five, would you intentionally push a person on the tracks to stop the trolley? Many people draw the line here. Diverting the trolley and killing one person is seen as something accidental, more removed. Pushing someone is seen as more involved, more murderous. Yet it can be argued they are the same. Whether you make a decision to flick a switch or push, you are condemning someone to die. In both cases, death was inevitable, and by acting, you minimized the number of deaths.

These are the sort of dilemmas for which we must all be prepared. This is nothing new to transhumanity. We program our car-flying AIs to make such life-and-death decisions when necessary, after all, yet they remain thorny to us. When an exsurgent outbreak is imminent, however, we will not have the time to debate. We must act. We must keep the survival of transhumanity in mind. We must be prepared to make sacrifices and live with consequences. The only other option will be not to live any more at all … [End Excerpt] ■

to a situation that is by definition beyond our understanding may seem like a hopeless cause, the crows behind this project continue to develop plans in the hope that transhumanity would in some way be able to survive.

OPERATION LONG SHOT

The purpose of this operation is to encourage extrasolar colonization by methods that don't involve Pandora gates. Though they put a lot of effort into quietly building or acquiring solar-sail ark ships, to be staffed by hibernoids and synths, their main focus is in manufacturing smaller processor ark ships that are little more than nanofabbers and infomorphs. Dozens of the latter have been sent out already, though the server keeps their destinations secret. A team of astronomer crows helps choose the best targets, though in the long run the server intends to send a seed ship to every star within 20 light years.

OPERATION MOMBI

Operation MOMBI is Firewall's ongoing and, so far, mostly unsuccessful attempt to penetrate the inner workings of Project Ozma. For reasons Firewall has not fully ascertained, few of our operatives are able to penetrate deeply into Ozma's workings. That doesn't stop us from trying, of course, because we'd certainly like to know what these bastards are up to—and what their real agenda is.

Case Moon Garden

Much like Case FERAL MORAINE, this case runs simulations and prepares for a TITAN outbreak on Luna, particularly originating from the New Mumbai Containment Zone.

Case Mystery

Unusual for many Firewall crow projects, Case MYSTERY does not engage in hands-on practical research in the physical sciences per se. Instead, the server behind this project analyzes the ethics behind various Firewall operations and potential catastrophe response contingencies. In a way, they serve as Firewall's conscience. Though they have no direct authority over Firewall's decisions, this server's discussion papers are held in wide regard in the Eye and help many sentinels and proxies alike find their way.

Operation Necronomicon

The purpose of this project is to study alien relics. Most of the crows in this server spend their time in the field, inspecting xenoarcheological sites on various exoplanets. A few are embedded within hypercorps and gate facilities, where they can keep tabs on private acquisitions and research projects.

Case Negative Geometry

NEGATIVE GEOMETRY is Firewall's exploration into the mechanics of Pandora gate wormholes and, in specific, the mechanisms that control them. There is an ongoing concern that the gates could themselves be used as weapons. Aside from the desire to achieve better control over gate operations, these researchers hope to be able to more effectively block off the gates should a hostile presence attempt to use them against us, learn how to permanently disable or destroy the gates, and possibly even gain insights into who manufactured them.

Operation Sauron

Maintaining the Eye's infrastructure and security is a monumental task. Several servers handle the workload together, under the aegis of Operation SAURON. Very little information is shared outside of these servers, as they handle very important data, such as the location of the Eye's physical servers, the implementation of its onion routers, the handling of cryptographic keys, maintenance of archives, and most importantly—ongoing overwatch and security. Some of the solar system's best hackers and system engineers have been recruited to this project. Much speculation surrounds this operation, ranging from rumors of argonaut involvement to use of xenocomputational tech and even ASI involvement.

Operation Solar Storm

One of Firewall's longest-running operations, SOLAR STORM has been on the trail of an alleged TITAN since the Fall. The main proxies in this server located the presence of a TITAN on Mars during the Fall, but forces at the time were ineffective at destroying it or keeping it contained to the TQZ. They have since followed a trail of evidence that they believe indicates the TITAN is still active, and also claim to have foiled some of its operations. A growing number of proxies in Firewall believe this operation is chasing nothing, but the server refuses to surrender its investigation. This project is closely aligned with Operation ERRANT ECCENTRIC.

Case Suicide Dreams

One of the more depressing x-risks we must deal with is the fact that transhumanity may wipe itself out—and one way that might happen is via a brutal faction conflict within the solar system. The server behind this project keeps an eye on aggressive stances, military build-ups, and ongoing memetic battles, hoping to identify and derail any potential conflicts before they occur. They keep a particularly close eye on the Jovians, though the Consortium's hegemonic ideals and hypercorp assets place them as the second-largest potential threat.

Case Third Eye

THIRD EYE is a dedicated scanner project that attempts to forecast likely future events. Using sophisticated AI support, the servers involved have seen significant success in modeling matters such as economic fluctuations, political struggles, patterns of criminal activity, social network trends, and even reputation network developments. These predictions are distributed back to Firewall via the Eye and sometimes are cause for initiating new projects.

Operation Traffickop

TRAFFICKOP is the code name for Firewall's ongoing surveillance of Nine Lives, the ID Crew, the St. Catherine Tong, and other soul-trafficking operations. The primary purpose of TRAFFICKOP is to watch for egos of interest to Firewall, be they captured sentinels or persons of interest. A secondary purpose is the embezzlement of funds by Firewall hackers to fund other missions. TRAFFICKOP is controversial within the Eye. While almost no one objects to stealing from soul thieves, reprisals, particularly from the more violent gangs like Nine Lives, could risk Firewall operational security. There's also a moral dimension: it's been argued that Firewall is in effect profiting from slave rings by skimming money from these gangs.

Working TRAFFICKOP is extremely dangerous, and many of the sentinels who do so are deeply committed to anti-slavery memes or have other, personal reasons. The op's detractors point out that the resulting lack of objectivity is a liability. The fact is, only a zealot would risk centuries of subjective time in one of the torture sims where Nine Lives puts traitors—and so zealots are recruited. The only other option would be agents acting under duress, but blackmailing sentinels into doing sensitive work runs counter to Firewall's philosophy.

OPERATION DOUBLE TAP

Start Æther Jabber
Active Members: 2

How goes the research?

Damn good. We uncovered another pragmatist black lab this week. Those fuckers think they can hide what they're doing from the rest of us, but no way are we going to let them.

Excellent. That makes three known sites then. We need to find every single one, though, no matter how many they have. If even one escapes our search, it could be the end of us all. Arrogant bastards.

We're on it. We're taking all of our recon slow. We don't want to accidentally trigger any of their defenses—assuming they were even smart enough to set them up. Last thing we want is to create the conditions where something they have contained is able to get out.

The longer we wait, the more chance something goes wrong and we all pay for their hubris.

We understand, but this type of surveillance takes time. We are keeping tabs on several of their key players, and we're confident they will eventually lead us to the others. Once we have their sites all mapped out, we can strike them all at once. Hit 'em, before they have any warning. We can't risk any sloppy surveillance that will tip them off.

Spoken like a true conservative. Have we come any closer to getting an inventory on what any of their labs hold?

Not yet. It's … in progress. That's all I can say right now.

Fair enough. I'll check in next week then.

Channel Closed
Channel Opened

I just checked in on my active little puppets. They just ID'd a third site, but no word of the package we're looking for just yet.

The longer we wait …

They're taking their time, and I don't have the influence to rush them.

I suppose if they can't be manipulated into pinpointing the exact location for us, we may just have to hit every site.

They're planning to do exactly that in the long run.

Yes, but we need to do it first. We need the package. Without it, our deal with You-Know-What falls through.

They're keeping me in the loop. They're convinced I'm one of theirs.

Maybe you need to get a bit closer to them, find a position where you can apply some pressure.

I'll look into it.

Good. Make sure they don't do anything stupid. If the pragmatists feel the heat, we may lose the trail for good. ♣

Several types of sentinels work this op. Hackers are the operation's cornerstone, misdirecting funds, rifling servers for kidnapped egos of interest, re-thieving stolen identities for use as fake IDs by sentinels, and maintaining the cover of gang infiltrators. Filters, preferably with some skill as resleeving technicians, infiltrate the gang's body banks. Muscle comes into play as a last resort, either in the form of mercenaries or of gangers who can convincingly blend in with the slavers' rank and file.

OPERATION USUAL SUSPECTS

Given the nature of Firewall activities, many proxies remain convinced it is just a matter of time before Firewall's existence is revealed to the public. In fact, it has already happened multiple times. Operation USUAL SUSPECTS is tasked with keeping Firewall's existence in the realm of myth, mesh superstition, and wingnut conspiracy theory—and so far it has succeeded. The servers behind this project are prepared to pick up where the filters on other operations have failed. In addition to an arsenal of talking points, misdirection, and fuel for destroying the reputations of witnesses and whistleblowers, they have a number of contingencies in place for framing fall guys, activating legions of sock puppets, and taking out certain broadcasting outlets using various means.

CASE VAPOR DREAD

Though a biological pandemic would not have the impact on transhumanity it might have had in the past, before the Fall, an outbreak of a deadly airborne pathogen in a major city such as Valles-New Shanghai or on multiple major habitats simultaneously could still potentially affect millions of lives. The crows and scanners behind this project plan out various plague containment scenarios, keep an eye on the latest biological threat developments, create cures, and establish countermeasures.

OPERATION VINEGAR

Operation VINEGAR's broad goal is investigation of the Factors as a potential x-risk. More specifically, they seek the answer to a number of open questions. Do the Factors have a local base in the Oort Cloud? Do they have FTL capability? Where is their homeworld? Do they really represent other species? What are their technological capabilities? What are their actual motives regarding transhumanity?

Whenever a Factor ship enters the solar system, the server behind this operation seeks to learn all they can—often by tapping into the scanning capabilities of the main transhuman polities. They also try to get an operative on board the ship, monitor all Factor transactions in detail, and hope to acquire whatever alien relics they can. More recently, they have been looking for extrasolar signs of Factor presences.

CASE WATCHMAKER

One of the interesting discoveries made about the TITANs during the Fall was that the seed AIs had conducted an incredible amount of research into human (and uplift) biology, specifically genetics and neurology. Unknown to almost everyone, some of this research data was actually captured on a TITAN storage unit and successfully decrypted. Though the data is dense, it reflects just a fragment of what the TITANs knew about us. Case WATCHMAKER was initiated to study what the TITANs had discovered. After several years, the research project has made some significant breakthroughs in understanding how the TITANs targeted transhumanity with basilisk hacks and various viruses, though it is strongly suspected that the TITANs will have perfected their techniques.

OPERATION WHITE RABBIT

The servers behind operation WHITE RABBIT are tasked with rooting out and handling infiltration of Firewall servers and cells by outside parties, as well as other potential methods of subversion. While they can be called in by proxies who suspect nefarious activity, WHITE RABBIT agents are also known to rotate into new servers for short periods purely to scope out any potential internal threats. These agents are all skilled at counterintelligence techniques. Even if they find nothing suspicious, they will often help a server upgrade its practices and internal security before they leave.

CASE YELLOW KING

Case YELLOW KING has one of the most dangerous jobs within Firewall—studying TITAN technology. The servers taking on this task are staffed almost entirely by pragmatists. Extensive care is taken not to handle active devices and heavy safeguards are instituted for almost all interactions with TITAN artifacts.

NOTABLE PLACES

To: Security Protocols Working Group
From: [REDACTED]
Subject: Special Firewall Facilities Document
Classification:
TOP SECRET / WHITE RABBIT EYES ONLY

I'm sending all of you a document that should help illustrate my point. I just extracted it from [REDACTED]'s data store. I have no idea where they got it from, or how long this document has been circulating, but it looks like a general guide to various Firewall sites, which is all well and good, except that a fair number of the sites being described are exceptionally secret. There are several here that I've never heard of, but I know this isn't just a hoax, because I also have personal experience with some of the other secret sites.

This sort of document is an excellent example of the problem that led us to create this working group. Some of our proxies and sentinels are sharing way too much information with each other and we need to find a way to increase security. In this particular case, I think the proxy was not acting maliciously. This particular proxy is a subscriber to the backup clique within Firewall, and they seem to have engaged in a project of cataloging Firewall sites to keep track of our organization assets should we ever become seriously fragmented. While well-intentioned, this project runs counter to our compartmentalization and classification protocols.

Also, while I've suspected that [REDACTED] had access to some impressively secret info, I know them well enough to be certain that they didn't create this entire document. I'm concerned that some of the write-ups have come from outside sources—initial document analysis seems to confirm this. If that's true, it raises two questions: how do outsiders have this info, and is everything in this document true?

STRANGE OBJECT

To: [Encrypted]
From: [Encrypted]

Look, I'm not trying to get involved in something above my clearance here. I just want to make sure there's nothing improper going on.

You have to admit the situation is weird. The astronomers were using some nifty new software, top-of-the line stuff, to map out the objects in that system. Maybe their hot new code had some glitches, but I don't think so. They very clearly picked up on something unusual: an object with an orbital pattern that just made no sense. They were really intrigued by it. It had to be an artificial orbit they said—something put in that orbit on purpose. Something about the resonance with other objects. They wouldn't have caught it without the upgraded code they were using.

Our server intercepted it, flagged it, and made sure the inquiry went no further. Then we took a closer look ourself. Sure enough, there was an object there—one with an unusually high albedo to boot. Almost like someone wanted it to stand out and be noticed.

So we arranged to take a closer look. We equipped a crasher team with a launch missile and an exploratory probe. They send it off, and we sit back and wait to see what we're going to find when it gets there.

Then, out of the blue, we get a notice from [REDACTED] server. So much for compartmentalization; I still don't even know how they knew about this little op. We get told, in no uncertain terms, that we are stepping in their territory and to immediately shut down the op. They came down hard. So we called off the probe.

I have to tell you, though, I'm not buying it. I've checked into [REDACTED] server, and as far as I can tell they've had nothing to do with extrasolar ops before. It just makes no sense. What would they have to do with some random orbital oddity, that's probably been floating out there in space for tens of thousands of years, in another star system that we only first found a year ago?

Something shady is going on. Either [REDACTED] server is up to something, or they know something we don't. And I'm not sure if that's a good or a bad thing. ♣

ALPHA-OMEGA: LUNAR TERMINAL

Classification: SECRET
Location: Selene Station

Darkcasting services live and die by their reputations. No one is willing to trust their ego to someone who's making deals with Nine Lives on the side or who has been known to hand over minds to the authorities or ego hunters. Firewall often has need to get its operatives inside a habitat secretly, so having arrangements with darkcasting terminals we trust is important.

For Luna, that terminal is a little outfit called Alpha-Omega, on the Selene Station torus in Lunar orbit. Ostensibly a bodymod and mindscaping parlor catering to the station's more interesting and eccentric people, they also run a thriving darkcasting op on the side. Two of Alpha-Omega's principals, Faith and Watson, are "retired" Firewall agents. Both worked as proxies in the Lunar-Lagrange theater for five years, until an unfortunate affair exposed the rest of their server to Project Ozma. While the others dispersed to lay low, Faith and Watson settled down to pursue their bodymod interests, using their extensive contacts to put together the darkcasting service behind their front biz.

While many darkcasting ops struggle to stay ahead of the authorities, the Alpha-Omega crew has arranged a form of protection for their service. As a major Lunar travel hub with large enclaves for many of the solar system's polities, the various powers-that-be have their own vested interests in having a discreet means of getting egos in and out of Selene. Alpha-Omega has cultivated a careful reputation for working with everyone, regardless of affiliations. Their clients include Lunar triads, autonomist saboteurs, hypercorp agents, Jovian spies, socialites playing hooky from their minders, and even the occasional oligarch looking to keep a low profile. Some members of Selene's own government and police forces have made use of Alpha-Omega's services, and so a blind eye is turned to their ongoing activities.

Though Alpha-Omega can offer an easy way in or out of Lunar space, their local resleeving options are limited. They keep only a few morphs on hand for clients. Instead, they have arrangements with black market body banks all across Luna, including most of the major habitats. So if your destination isn't Selene itself, they can probably get you there either by way of their local darkcasting network or physical courier. It's worth noting that not all of the other darkcasting terminals have Alpha-Omega's ironclad reputation, and the A-O crew vouches only for themselves.

If you're looking to resleeve on Selene, Alpha-Omega has ties to several local sources, so at the least you can find yourself a cheap case. If you need any biomod work done, Faith and Watson's services are excellent and discreet. Their partner Cecily also provides quality psychosurgical options, if you need memory edits or other personality tweaks.

Recent reports indicate that the Lunar triads have been leaning on the A-O crew, either seeking to put them out of business or subsume their operations. Firewall normally tries to stay out of local politics and disputes, but considering what a valuable asset this darkcasting terminal has been to our ongoing interests, we may need to step in and lend a hand.

BALANI

Classification:
TOP SECRET / DUST MITE EYES ONLY

Sometimes we get really lucky; Balani is one of those cases. You've never heard of this system for a very good reason. The world was first discovered during one of the various hypercorp efforts to send automated probes through the Martian Gate to dozens of gate addresses to see which ones were worth further exploration. A group of vectors gained access to the survey first, and when they saw what looked like a blasted world that once held intelligent life, they decided to replace this information with data on an entirely boring and commonplace baked rockball. Having convinced everyone the exoplanet was worthless, a Firewall front group was brought in to purchase exclusivity rights (even paying the dead-end world rate, this is not the sort of thing we can do very often) and a team of sentinels was sent to investigate.

There is no evidence that the TITANs ever visited Balani, but we now have access to a world that was inhabited until relatively recently and where we know exactly how the inhabitants died. 18,000 years ago, Balani was home to an advanced civilization. These sapients were roughly human sized, had six limbs, and were radially symmetrical. Their technology was different from ours and in some ways, it seems to have been more advanced—particularly with the biosciences. They don't seem to have done much with the sorts of mechanically based nanotechnology we use, but they deployed tailored bacteria for many of the same purposes.

Then, something happened. Maybe it was an accident, maybe it was terrorism or war, or perhaps they had their own TITANs who saw an easy way to wipe out these sapients. We don't know why, but we know what happened. Some type of bacterial nanotech got loose, something in the vein of a universal flesh-eating organism, like alien ebola on steroids. Of course, nothing is truly universal, but it devoured the Balanis and almost all other complex land-based life on the planet. This in turn wrecked the ecosystem, leading to major climate change and large-scale death of much of the plant life. Today, Balani is in the first stages of recovery from a catastrophe where more than 80% of all animal life on land died and more than 66% of all aquatic life died. In short, its ecosystem is still a mess.

From our point of view, Balani was never a paradise. Even before the die-off, it was too hot, with temperatures averaging 40 to 65 C across most of the two large land masses. The air was too thick and it contained almost 3% carbon dioxide. Now, the air is slightly more than 5% carbon dioxide and there's only 70% as much oxygen in the atmosphere as there was 18,000 years ago. To stay here, you either need to sleeve in a synth or have some lung augmentation, otherwise Balani will kill you slowly and you'll feel wretched every minute that you're here. Of course, this different environment also has one big advantage: while Balani life is chemically very similar to us, it's sufficiently different that their bacterial ecophage has no effect on any Earth-derived life.

Firewall's main interest isn't the climate, of course. We want to get a heads-up on the technology here and are specifically interested in determining if the Balanis had their own TITANs or made use of the Pandora gates. We know they sent partially organic space probes to all of the worlds in their star system, and we have plans to explore a surviving space station and a small base they built on one of their two moons. They were at least 50 years behind us in space technology, so almost no one was able to flee the planet when the ecophage started taking the Balanis apart; the space stations and moon base were too small to survive on their own. After 18,000 years, their cities are all ruins, but so far our exploration teams have uncovered five sealed facilities that are in surprisingly good shape. Though each of these refuges was sealed to survive the ecophage apocalypse, these sites have unfortunately raised more questions than they've answered. Three of the bunkers contained Balani remains, but we haven't yet determined why the survivors died. The other two, even more intact, seem to have been completely empty of life.

The bacterial strain that devastated their planet is also undergoing study. While our own nanotech is in many ways more advanced and can be used to build or modify non-organic materials, their ecophage is self-replicating in a way that nothing but exsurgent tech can manage. Pockets of the strain remain active in some areas, which is an ongoing concern. Our teams are careful to monitor that it does not adapt to being effective against Earth-based biologies—while we want to understand the risks of unleashing such a green goo threat, we don't want to unleash it on ourselves.

BALANI

Type:
Terrestrial (Habitable)

Primary Star:
F8V

Gravity:
1.18 g

Diameter:
14,500 km

Atmospheric Pressure:
1.8 atm

Atmospheric Composition:
82% Nitrogen, 12% Oxygen, 5% Carbon Dioxide

Surface Temperature (Mean):
30 C

Day Length:
27 hours

Orbital Period:
608 days

Satellites:
2

Gate Access:
Martian Gate

Given the potential dangers, it is critical to Firewall's interests to keep Balani a secret. We don't want anyone else mucking around there, getting a hold of samples of the ecophage, and bringing them back to our solar system. Currently, we have a team of 18 operatives working on Balani, and we likely need more. We're also hoping to find a path to Balani via the Fissure or Portal gates, since that would allow more secure access to this world and make it easier to maintain a large presence there.

BREAKOUT

Classification: CONFIDENTIAL

Welcome to the truth about one of the system's more popular action simulspace games. Yes, we do indeed mean *Breakout,* the hit sci-fi game. It may be virtual reality, but it certainly seems real enough while you're in there.

There's a decent chance you've played *Breakout*. Most of the game is exactly what it looks like, a place for gamers in high-powered simulmorphs to blow up alien monstrosities. That part of the game isn't ours, but it is wildly popular. Naturally, a game like this was too tempting for us to pass up. In fact, the nature of the content brought it immediately to our intention. Though it's presented as fiction, there's no arguing that *Breakout's* plot and setting are based on the Fall and encounters with exsurgents and TITAN machines. The content strongly implies that someone involved in the game's development had real life experience with the threats explored. Even more interesting, the game incorporates many aspects of our enemies that were rumored or even reported on during the Fall, but which were discredited or downplayed by memetic and disinformation campaigns, as part of the game's fiction. It's almost as if someone intentionally designed it to help reinforce the narrative cover stories that groups like Firewall and the Planetary Consortium maintain. We've taken some looks into the publisher, Extreme Voltage Software, to see who might have put the hooks in and pushed this project along. We have some leads, but nothing concrete—though my bet's on Ozma.

Where *Breakout* gets even more interesting is that it has a very active fan modding community. These fans create their own levels and freely distribute them, and they are very popular. It just so happens that a few of Extreme Voltage's former devs now work for Firewall. Along with a working group of vectors and game-designer crows, they've created a series of bonus levels. Originally intended for internal Firewall training simulations, these levels have since been distributed publicly under the Crisis coding-team banner. These levels are simultaneously loved and hated by different elements of the game community for being "brutal"—that's because we turn off the heroism and the unreality. They are designed to represent the physical world as closely as possible. If you can't do something in real life, you won't be able to do it in *Breakout: Crisis*. These levels are arguably the best simulation of exsurgent and TITAN activity that anyone in the solar system has been able to create. Our designers are continuously refining their models and adding new material based on actual after-mission reports and XP logs from sentinels. In short, it gets a bit creepier and nastier every few months. We're also pleased that much of this detail has ended up imported into other fan-mod levels; a fair number of users seem to like creepy gaming.

TRAINING GROUNDS

The benefits of using *Breakout: Crisis* as a training sim are obvious. Aside from actual experience in facing exsurgent incidents and the nightmares of the Fall, nothing else comes close to putting our people in similar scenarios to see how they'd handle it—with the added bonus that you won't lose continuity when something hideous eats your stack or reformats your brain. Some sessions can be deeply horrible, but the realism is what makes it so valuable. Let's be blunt—anyone without a great deal of experience is likely to be shaken by the situations in which our sentinels find themselves. We send our operatives out to encounter exsurgents and exhumans that appear fundamentally *wrong* in a way that's even more messed up than a sicko sleeved in a case wearing a flayed-flesh mask. Perhaps instead they have to survive the attentions of coldly malevolent machines that relentlessly seek to decapitate them or asyncs who invade the most private recesses of their mind. On a really bad day, they may encounter something capable of defying the laws of physics as we know them. In real life, people freeze up, panic, or make bad decisions in these situations. The more we can acclimate them to the harsh realities they may encounter, the more likely they are to keep their head on their shoulders, literally, when they are actually in the field.

The other value in *Breakout: Crisis* is that it shows us who our operatives really are—the true faces they reveal in crisis situations. Can they deal with a threat, when doing so may run counter to their ideological principles? Do they have the strength of will to pull the trigger, knowing that they are sentencing innocents to die, in order to prevent even more people from being exposed to a risk? It also trains them to act quickly and decisively. "The only way to stop this outbreak is to blow up this entire hab and murder tens of thousands of innocent people, some of whom may not have backups elsewhere. You have 5 seconds to decide."

Breakout is brutal and terrifying, and it contains various memetic triggers designed to enhance your emotional involvement, but of course you always know it's a game. For the hardcore operatives, however, we offer a "full-reality mode" where we fork you, edit the fork so that it has no idea that it's in a simulspace, and send it through *Breakout,* usually with a team of other Firewall operatives who have also been edited in this fashion. Then, we reintegrate this fork afterwards. Our expert psychosurgeons

FIREWALL SPACES

Source: EyeWiki [Link]

Firewall is dispersed and decentralized, but it has need for many types of temporary and even permanent locations. Here's an overview of places you may find yourself in the course of your Firewall duties.

BLACK LABS

Firewall employs a lot of crows, and these scientists need secure places to conduct their research. A large number of crows work in above-ground labs, whether those are operated by hypercorps, government projects, non-profits, universities, the argonauts, or autonomist cooperatives. In these situations, the crows use their day job as cover for the research they perform on the side for Firewall. Crows working in these conditions must split their attention—they usually have ongoing projects that they cannot simply abandon without a good explanation, and "my clandestine group needs me" doesn't usually work as an excuse. It is not uncommon for these crows to fork themselves in order to maintain their aboveground work and simultaneously run secret experiments for Firewall. On the positive side, these crows can usually devote resources from their legit lab environment to Firewall's purposes, sometimes with the aid of vectors to cover their tracks. Naturally, these researchers must take care to keep their side activities hidden and secure, lest they be discovered and labeled a terrorist, criminal, traitor, or worse.

Of course, Firewall also maintains its own dedicated labs. This is the preferred situation for conducting research on topics we don't want to fall into the hands of others. If there is any chance that an experiment could result in something dangerous or contagious, it is almost always deferred to a Firewall-exclusive black lab. Labs of this sort are many and varied, located all across the solar system, from the souks of Mars to private craft hidden in a scum swarm to isolated asteroids in the Kuiper Belt. As a rule of thumb, the more dangerous or sensitive the research, the more remotely it is conducted from transhuman populations. Most labs focus on particular fields of research, such as alien genetics or reverse-engineering TITAN code, but some are cross-disciplinary in line with the particular Firewall operations they support. The quality and quantity of the equipment ranges from jury-rigged to state-of-the-art, depending on the resources of the server at hand. Most black labs of this sort have security measures in place to destroy the lab should a security breach occur; these are specifically designed to cleanse any potential contaminants.

BODY BANKS

In most circumstances, Firewall prefers to rely on legit or black-market body banks for resleeving purposes. In a few particularly populated locales such as Valles-New Shanghai and Shackle, however, Firewall maintains its own discreet body banks exclusively for proxies and sentinels. The morph selection at these secret body banks is understandably limited and tends to focus on skins and shells that are especially useful for Firewall ops or are otherwise hard-to-get. Some of the morphs are reserved for use by specialists, particularly erasers.

CACHES

Caches are hidden supplies of weapon, armor, fabbers, and other gear. These are especially useful in polities where nanofab is restricted and certain goods are hard to find. Caches tend to be small and well-hidden: a duffel bag stashed behind the pipes in a never-used maintenance shaft, an unremarkable box spot-welded to a hab's exterior, a case buried under 3 meters of Lunar regolith, a radar-absorbent vac-sealed package in orbit around an unclaimed asteroid, or simply a private storage locker rented under a fake ID. Caches are intended to be used until their supplies are exhausted or their location is exposed.

A subset of caches called *scratch spaces* are intended for use on a temporary basis to store items that need to be researched, cleansed of evidence, relocated, or otherwise dealt with (at least in theory; in practice, these sometimes linger for years before registers have the time and manpower to deal with the contents).

CRYPTS

Similar to physical caches, crypts are virtual locations used to hide and store important data. These are used both to secretly exchange messages and store large datafiles (such as secret research or stolen archives) where they will not be found. Protected by passcodes and hidden by steganographic or other means, crypts are commonly hosted within public simulspace environments or public AR channels, where they can be accessed without raising suspicion.

DARKCASTING TERMINALS

While Firewall also prefers to use existing darkcasting services, gaps in the coverage or security concerns have occasionally forced us to establish our own out of necessity. Our darkcast terminals also help to maintain the Eye's private network in addition to egocasting options. The primary challenge of running a darkcasting service is both maintaining the transceivers and drawing the requisite amount of energy from the local grid without being discovered by local authorities. Even when using tight-beam transmitters to avoid signal interception, the transmission and reception equipment is difficult to conceal from physical observation and discovery. While a few our darkcasting terminals maintain ongoing operations, also providing

services to various black market and criminal elements, most of our terminals are "on call," and so only deployed when a specific need arises.

DEAD DROPS

As a matter of course, every server sets up their own dead drops. These are locations where physical goods can be exchanged, often in public view, in a manner which won't raise suspicion. To facilitate this, most dead drops make use of common everyday items or places that have been specially modified: a loosened floor panel, a cabinet with a false back, a disassembler that doesn't disassemble certain items, an equipment locker with a hidden hole, and so on.

GARAGES

Sometimes, neither egocasting nor booking passage on a commercial spacecraft is feasible for a mission. It's not like you can just egocast into a hab run by a soul-trading crime boss, and egocasting into a hab run by a mind-control cult is a great way to end up as their latest mind-edited thrall. Also, these places aren't really high on the destination list for passenger ships. That's where garages come in.

Garages are places where Firewall stores ships it has control over. Most of these are smaller vessels: LOTVs, fighter craft, GEVs, and couriers. Some even have spacecraft morphs: nautiloids, couriers, sundivers, and so on. We don't really have the resources to acquire larger craft. As is, most of the craft in these garages have been salvaged, "borrowed," or otherwise acquired in the course of an operation. Likewise, their quality and state of repair varies. When you need to get somewhere the direct way, however, you can't always be picky. While we don't have enough garages to provide coverage of the entire solar system, we do have a number of antimatter couriers that can get just about anywhere in the solar system quickly.

OPS CENTERS

Where do the proxies in a server operate from? The answer is simple: anywhere they can. The physical realities of proxy operations are defined by necessity and chance as much as available resources or strategic planning. I've known servers that operated in isolation from hidden asteroid bases, squatted derelict cluster modules, or set up in secret caves in the remote outback of Mars. Others hide within population centers in faux-business front group offices, seedy hotels, or nondescript private homes, or they take over unused spaces like forgotten basements and maintenance tunnels. Some keep on the move in private spacecraft, Venusian zeppelins, or Martian land rovers. Quite a few—possibly most—operate as virtual groups, interacting online without maintaining any sort of physical proximity. The latter method is most effective at concealing their operations from prying eyes.

REFUGES

Refuges are the province of the backup clique and their numerous survival-oriented operations. These are survival bunkers, stocked with nanofabbers, blueprints, clone-growth vats, millions of egos in cold storage, the collected knowledge of transhumanity, and other equipment that might allow a portion of transhumanity to survive an apocalyptic event and repopulate. These refuges are well hidden and kept secret, to increase their odds of survival, and placed throughout the solar system and various extrasolar worlds. They require an immense amount of effort and resources to build, so they are so far limited in number. Unless you're a backup, you probably won't deal with these much—but if you wake up in one, you can assume things got bad. Real bad.

SAFEHOUSES

Safehouses are secretive sites that Firewall maintains in most large habitats. They are designed as places where operatives can rest, heal, lay low, and gain access to items that they might need. They vary in size and lavishness, with the low end being a large closet with a healing vat, a desktop cornucopia machine, and an ego bridge. The best are similar to mid-range hotel suites with comfortable beds and similar facilities that also contain a pair of healing vats, an ego bridge, several morphs in storage, at least one desktop cornucopia machine, and a stock of pre-made gear, including weapons and armor. Some safehouses also contain a darknet farcaster that can be deployed as needed.

Setting up safehouses in their theater of operation is SOP for all Firewall servers. The most important feature of a safehouse is that it is truly off the grid. The ideal location is one with spotty or non-existent exterior surveillance (except for our own). This is to prevent our operatives from being tracked to the safehouse or from their movements being observed. Also, regardless of local laws, all cornucopia machines in safehouses are loaded with a wide range of templates and lack any limiting protocols to prevent them from creating weapons or other gear. The machines and equipment in safehouses are programmed to wipe their records should a failsafe alarm be triggered or if they are removed from the premises. None of these locations contain antimatter, large amounts of radioactives or anything similar, but they'll allow you to hide, request backup, obtain any vitally needed items, and even manufacture valuable and difficult-to-obtain items you can trade for information. ■

ensure there are no problems with the editing or merging, but playing *Breakout: Crisis* in this manner has been known to inflict serious trauma on some people. On the positive side, I've heard from players who later faced actual exsurgents that full-reality mode helped prepare them.

Pinpointing Recruits and Threats

One of the advantages of releasing *Breakout: Crisis* to the public is that we can monitor the leaderboards for our levels. We have actually used this method to recruit some of the top players, particularly those who are skilled exsurgent hunters while maintaining low mission profiles and not dying too often.

On the opposite end, our scanners have also made use of our levels to monitor for potential threats. One level in particular features an optional quest to become a super-powerful exhuman. We included a fair number of real details about exhumans and also made the quest exceedingly difficult. Most players ignore it, and the majority of those that don't give up pretty quickly. However, a very small number of players play it all the way through and then seem to enjoy the heck out of playing an exhuman monster. We make a note of those players and monitor them. In real life, this has helped us to intercept one player who was seeking out contact with an actual exhuman cell.

Other Uses

There is no denying that *Breakout: Crisis* has also opened other opportunities for us. For example, some of the ideas that Firewall deals with are inherently dangerous. Having a popular VR game that deals with these memes helps us to make them more palatable to the public. It gives players an idea of how to react should they be caught in a real-life exsurgent breakout. It has even helped us with cover-ups. On at least one occasion, our filters have undermined the credibility of eyewitnesses by labeling them as obsessive *Breakout* players confusing VR with reality.

Some of our crows have also met with mixed success when using *Breakout: Crisis* to crowdsource help with puzzling data. These data sets have been incorporated into the game as mysteries to be solved for mission success or to earn bonuses on the side. While these efforts haven't helped us decipher any fragments of alien language yet, players have provided novel approaches for working with real life xeno-artifacts that our crows have actually deployed in lab settings.

Cinder

Classification:
TOP SECRET /
YELLOW KING ACOLYTE EYES ONLY

Cinder is an impressively worthless extrasolar moon. It's a well-scorched rock 3,000 kilometers in diameter orbiting an equally scorched planet orbiting a white dwarf star. The planet, called Policy (apparently a joke about scorched earth), has a Pandora gate and was visited five years ago by a team of gatecrashers and then largely ignored. Researchers say Policy may once have been an Earth-like world, but that was back before multicellular life evolved back home. Around that time, Policy's star went red giant and roasted both planet and moon before shrinking down to a white dwarf, leaving Policy and Cinder as charred, frozen, airless rockballs.

After a few visits by astronomers, people stopped coming to Policy, which makes it perfect for our purposes after we also found a route there via the Portal Gate. Policy is a planet no one wants, so no one is going to visit, and even if they do, they're even less likely to travel to its moon. Thus, Cinder makes a very useful location for a secret facility. Even should someone come through the gate and find evidence of our periodic shuttle flights, we have established a cover claiming to be an astronomical survey project.

So, what is Firewall doing a few hundred parsecs from home? Hiding really dangerous stuff, of course.

Cinder

Type:
Terrestrial Moon (Tidally Locked)

Satellite of:
Policy

Primary Star:
A6VII

Gravity:
0.18 g

Diameter:
3,500 km

Atmospheric Pressure:
0.01 atm

Atmospheric Composition:
Trace Potassium

Surface Temperature (Mean):
–100 C

Day Length:
8 days

Orbital Period:
8 days

Gate Access:
Vulcanoid and Portal Gates

The Cinderblock

The vault we have hidden away on Cinder, known as the Cinderblock, is where a cooperative of pragmatist servers store TITAN and exsurgent artifacts that are too interesting or potentially useful to destroy, but too dangerous, or more often too unknown, to allow anyone to work with anyplace in the solar system. In addition to storing these items, the crows here catalog and perform various non-invasive tests on everything in the facility and then perform further research and experimentation on the artifacts that seem to be safe enough to work with. We move anything that we learn to operate to another facility.

The Cinderblock originally housed alien artifacts as well, but as the collection grew, these were moved to [REDACTED: TOP SECRET / NECRONOMICON ACOLYTE EYES ONLY]. Additionally, after an unfortunate accident involving one of our researchers, any artifacts that are shown to be sensitive to async abilities were also relocated to [REDACTED: TOP SECRET / EPHEMEROL DOSE EYES ONLY],

where they could be stored and studied under even more controlled conditions.

SECURITY

Given its contents, the Cinderblock is designed not only to keep intruders out, but to keep anything hostile from escaping within. The standing policy is to see these objects destroyed rather than let them escape or fall into the wrong hands. Aside from state-of-the-art security systems, the facility itself is wired with antimatter bombs that can be manually or remotely detonated, enough to turn the base and the surrounding 200 kilometers into a nice big crater. Every staff member has the detonation codes, and they are also programmed to go off should a certain threshold of alarms be triggered. The shuttles are also equipped with conventional explosives, to cut off access/escape if needed. Buried weapon platforms around the base provide further protection. Finally, an antimatter bomb is buried under the gate itself, overseen by an AI with authority to trigger it should a hostile force emerge or a shuttle approach from Cinder without the proper authorization codes. That bomb probably won't destroy the gate, but it will hopefully bury it in enough debris and condensed rock vapor that no one will be using it for a good long time.

CLASSIFICATION

The Cinderblock is a top secret project (YELLOW KING ACOLYTE clearance), with knowledge only given to confirmed pragmatists with YELLOW KING clearance. The reason for this is due to potential hostilities from conservatives within Firewall. Though it is common knowledge that Firewall maintains facilities like this, their locations and contents are deliberately classified to keep them safe. In fact, many of these artifacts have been reported destroyed. There are a large number of sentinels and proxies who would love to eliminate all TITAN and exsurgent artifacts. Some of them see the value of experimenting with the devices that we almost understand or at least hope to soon be able to comprehend. However, they'd love to toss all of the wildly dangerous stuff and artifacts that currently keep us baffled, believing that these inexplicable and inert artifacts are time bombs waiting to go off. We can't say they're wrong, but you also can't un-destroy something. If the TITANs return or we encounter some other invasive x-threat, we're going to need every possible edge we have, and something here might provide the help we need.

We've already had incidents of sabotage at our other facilities. Three years ago, a Firewall operative left a concealed antimatter grenade with a QE-comm detonator at another vault. We let them think we hadn't discovered it. We disabled the grenade before they left and hacked the inputs on the bomb's QE comm so that their signal appeared to detonate it. We believe the conservatives think that facility was destroyed, and we mean to keep it that way.

GRAILHUNTER

Classification: TOP SECRET / FAR HORIZONS EYES ONLY
Location: Scattered Disc

We already know the Factors don't trust the Pandora gates and they have managed to survive for quite a long time, so placing backups for human civilization on a world easily accessible via Pandora gates seems foolish to the extreme. I'm betting the Factors are correct, which is why Operation FAR HORIZONS is pursuing a radical alternative to the various refuges. We recently constructed a small micrograv habitat

EPISTEMOLOGICAL THREATS

Decrypted chat; participants not positively identified

Start Æther Jabber
Active Members: 2

- VP: So, you're of a speculative bent.
- RC: I'm interested in the questions that no one else is asking.
- VP: Such as, "What's the probability that we all actually live in a sim controlled by an outside intelligence?"
- RC: Actually … yes. Although that one's not top of my mind.
- VP: Something less esoteric?
- RC: I should hope so. Or rather, I hope the Epistemological Threats server isn't wasting its time on Roko's Basilisk and drek like that.
- VP: That old chestnut? No. But gauging the probability that we're all sims isn't an exact science.
- RC: Yes, back to that. What's your methodology?
- VP: A simulation's resolution must be less than that of the universe within which it's running. We try to break the sim.
- RC: Interesting. So why is it that there's no mention of this server anywhere on the Eye's VPNs?
- VP: Firewall has some very odd ducks in it, dear. But we're more than odd ducks. We're straight up loons.
- RC: So the Invisible Word is a secret from the rest of Firewall?
- VP: Do you believe that the unknowable can hurt us?
- RC: Yes.
- VP: Should I tell everyone in Firewall that a group of their colleagues are trying to figure out how to break reality on the suspicion that it's a simulation?
- RC: Probably not.
- VP: Well, there you go, my lamb. Are you in or not? ☘

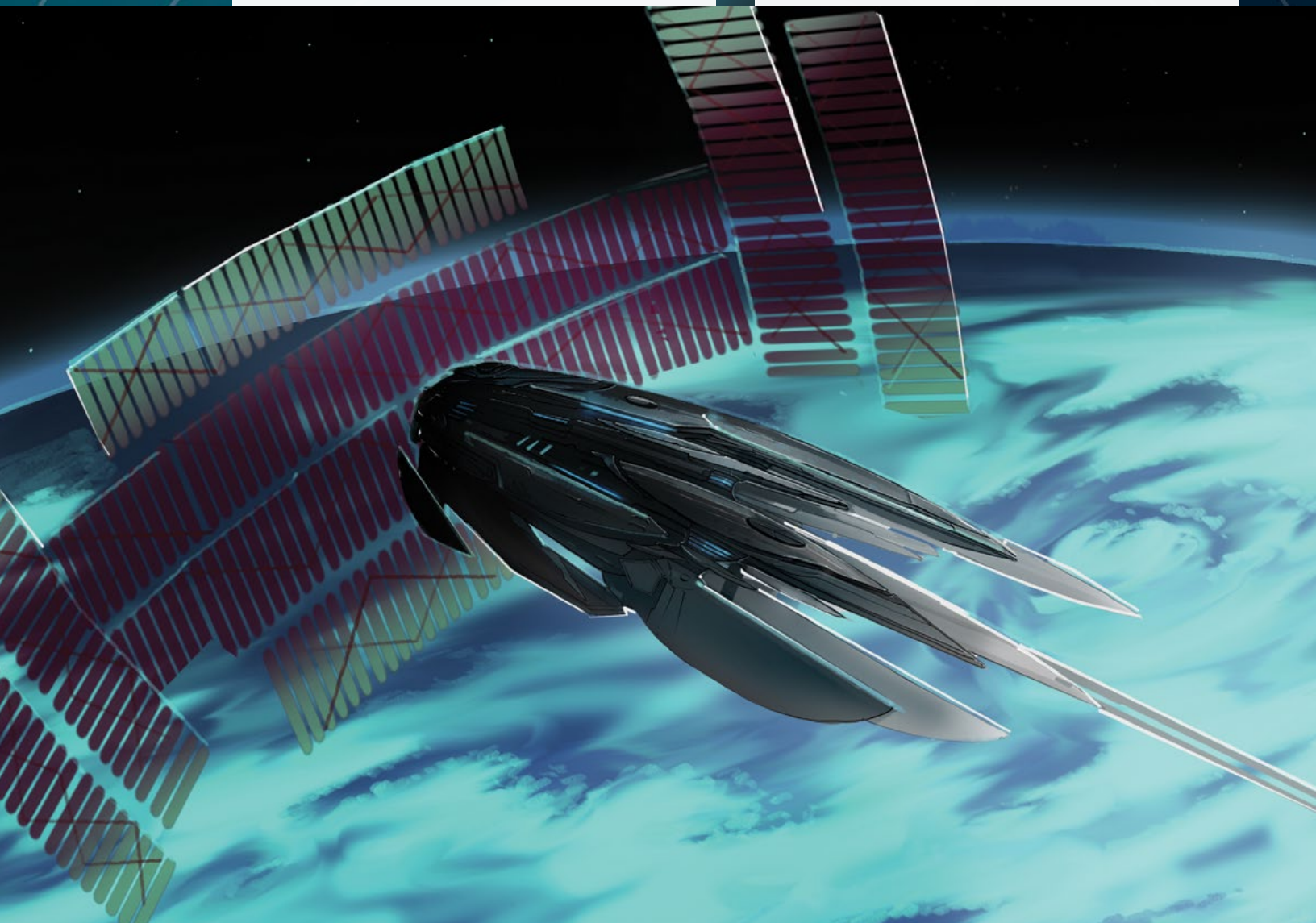
with the same capabilities as Operation FORCED RETIREMENT sanctuaries inside a large Kuiper Belt object, then built a small torus around it. Then, we fitted it with a magnetic sail and, three months ago, launched it. We're using a magnetic sail because a fusion drive flare would let everyone know exactly where we're going. Currently, the only way to locate the cometship is to know exactly where to look for it. So far, only a few astronomers have noticed it, and the cometship looks no different from other efforts to colonize the Oort Cloud.

Our plans, of course, are to go a whole lot further. Our destination is Lalande 21185, a red dwarf star 8 light years away. We know it has one gas giant the size of Saturn, another the size of Neptune, a pair of terrestrial planets, and a large asteroid belt. It's not a big planetary system, but it should have sufficient resources for any reasonable purpose. The magnetic sail powering the comet has gotten it heading out of the solar system, but at its current speed, it will take around 20,000 years to reach its destination. We trust our nanotech, but that might be too long for anything transhumanity can currently build. However, we're working on constructing a series of particle beams at various points around the Kuiper Belt that we will aim at the magnetic sail. If we succeed in constructing these particle beams, we can get the ship going 30 to 150 times faster, allowing it to arrive after only a few centuries.

Our plan is for the ship to activate once it is within a year or two of its destination, bringing a few dozen of the stored minds to consciousness and starting to grow or build bodies for the rest. We picked Lalande 21185 because no one has found a Pandora gate that accesses this star system, and it's near enough for us to possibly reach it within a reasonable time. We also hope that it will be too far away for anything that destroys transhumanity in the solar system to worry about.

Currently, the ship is at around 300 AU from the sun, meaning that it's barely within egocasting range. We plan to send out occasional one-way forks with updates on a periodic basis for as long as we can. These forks are under orders to conduct maintenance tasks and then put themselves in storage. They are to maintain radio silence unless there is an emergency on the ship.

The backup server that completed and launched the *Grailhunter* is very proud of the cometship and hopes you will be too. The future of transhumanity may very well rest on the efforts of long-term survival projects like this.



To: [Encrypted]
From: [Encrypted]

Trust me, I've seen some of the early mission reports, back before the Fall was fully over. Back before they scrubbed all of the records. I know they have an intact TITAN core. The Germans had managed to score one, but we couldn't allow them or anyone else to keep it. The original plan was to destroy it, but the proxies involved changed the game plan. They were all pragmatists; they couldn't resist the opportunity to "study" it. Idiots.

I've spent years trying to track down where they might have taken it. The trail went cold long ago, but I've been trying to keep an eye on their projects—specifically the ones they try to keep off the books, outside of the awareness of the rest of us. I've narrowed it down to a few places they might be keeping it. One of them is Hotfire.

Why Hotfire? It's one of the few places secure enough. If you ask me, it's almost too secure for its alleged intended purpose. They've gotten something else in there, something they're hiding under the skirts of a facility that's already blacker than the hole at the galactic core. A third lab.

I know the other conservatives argue that if the pragmatists had a TITAN, they wouldn't keep it in the solar system. Too risky. I see the point, but they're forgetting that the gates themselves are a risk. We don't know who or what made them. We don't know if they're monitoring our gate activity. We don't know if a captive TITAN would make it from one side of the portal to the other. I'm willing to bet the pragmatists didn't want to take that risk.

I could be wrong. Or the pragmatists could be sitting on a TITAN over there. I can only hope they've been smart enough to keep the thing unplugged. ✤

HOTFIRE

Classification:
TOP SECRET / RED QUEEN EYES ONLY
Location: Neptunian Trojans

Welcome to the cold and dark, where some of our people do exceptionally dangerous stuff. If you're reading this, you're either a proxy or some poor sucker who got too deep into the sorts of research sane people would never consider. That's why Hotfire is in the Neptunian Trojans. We're keeping it far enough away from anywhere else so that anything that gets loose will have a very hard time spreading to anyplace inhabited—or, in fact, to anyplace at all. However, we also want to make certain that it's not so far out that someone can't get here in a reasonable time. Of course, if something takes out the lab's egocaster, help will take at least 10 weeks to arrive, so if you're working there, don't expect rescuers to show up in time to save you from some terrible fate.

Hotfire is for research that is intrinsically dangerous. The researchers currently have two primary areas of study: basilisk hacks and self-replicating nanotechnology. Each of these divisions is located in a separate, unconnected facility beneath Hotfire's surface. Hotfire is a beehive hab roughly 200 kilometers in diameter, so there's plenty of room.

THE AEGIS LAB

In the first division, researchers evaluate and test the few basilisk hacks transhumanity has managed to record. Some of this research demands that they observe carefully what the basilisk hack does. The individuals working on this project use their own edited forks as test subjects. They run these tests using a variety of morphs, forks, and inputs, observing the effects and comparing the results. Their goal is to identify the genetic and neural (or neuroprogramming) traits that make the subjects susceptible, as well as developing potential countermeasures.

Yes, exposing your own fork, even a heavily pruned one, to TITAN-created horror is pretty sickening to consider, but ethically speaking we could only accept volunteers. As long as everyone observes basic safety protocols, this is the safest avenue of research. However, it's also the least productive. We only have a handful of such hacks. One shuts down cognition or perception for anywhere from a few minutes to several hours, another compels obedience if combined with a command, and the third crashes a mind in a way that only about 40% of targets ever recover from. The Aegis Lab crows have created sensory filters that can block each of these hacks, but these filters typically have no effect on new hacks. So far, all options for "immunizing" morphs against basilisk hacks have only proven effective against hacks that were deployed early during the Fall; current basilisks encountered in the field have upgraded capabilities.

To date, the Aegis Lab has suffered one serious breach. In this case, a test subject fork managed to fool the researchers into thinking the hack had no effect. We don't know the full details, but the fork was somehow affected in a way that enabled it to fool all the cognitive tests. Then, it somehow convinced the researcher who created the fork to merge with it, against standard protocols. After that, the infection began to spread. Someone discovered what was going on and managed to trigger the lab's failsafe measures before anyone or anything could escape. Everyone in that facility had to be restored from their most recent backup, and that entire section had to be rebuilt, but the rest of Hotfire was unaffected.

THE PEST CONTROL LAB

The Pest Control Lab works with self-replicating nanotechnology. Arguably, this may be the most dangerous research Firewall conducts within the bounds of the solar system. The crows here have a small sampling of TITAN nanoswarms with which to study and experiment on. None of these nanoswarm

specimens are kept within the Hotfire labs; instead they are sealed inside a teleoperated facility deep within a separate asteroid, dubbed the Rock, which is one kilometer in diameter and orbits Hotfire at a distance of 200 kilometers.

The goal of the research here is twofold. First, the crows seek to understand how the TITAN self-replicating nanotech works. In particular, they are seeking out methods of potentially reprogramming these nanoswarms, potentially bringing them under control. This could be a huge boon for countering nanoswarms currently active on Earth and in the TQZ, especially if we can manipulate the nanoswarms to destroy each other. Secondly, the crows experiment with more conventional methods and weapons in order to identify the most effective countermeasures. This avenue of research has proven less effective than most; while some weapons offer short-success in diminishing swarms, they are usually able to regrow and counter the countermeasures over time.

SECURITY

Not unexpectedly, we want to make certain that nothing ever escapes from Hotfire. Each of the labs is outfitted with plasmablast and thermobaric charges designed to sterilize that facility. Hotfire also contains a large antimatter bomb that is designed to vaporize everything there if things go badly wrong. However, these are only part of this facility's security protocols.

In order to further compartmentalize the labs, Hotfire's egocaster and docking facilities for spacecraft are both located in a separate small cluster hab only a few hundred meters in diameter that orbits Hotfire at a distance of 450 kilometers. This physical gap is intended to help contain anything that gets loose. The dock contains spartan accommodations, healing vats, and both personal and large-scale weapons as well as the lab's egocaster. It also has a QE comm that can be used to trigger the antimatter bomb inside Hotfire with the proper authorization codes. Another bomb would destroy the dock. On Hotfire itself, long-range comms of any sort are forbidden, including emergency farcasters, as are fabber templates for all such devices. The teleoperated equipment on the Rock is handled via short-range radio transmissions.

The protocol for visiting ships is to park at least 800 kilometers from both the Hotfire and the dock and then to communicate with the individual on comm duty and download and review recent records. If everything checks out, the ship sends over a shuttle controlled from the ship, which carries any passengers and cargo between the ship and the dock. Another shuttle then carries everything between the dock and Hotfire. So far, Hotfire has managed to contain all problems, but I'm betting they'll eventually use one or both bombs.

Hotfire's final line of defense is the courier spacecraft you see orbiting the facility at a distance of 1,200 kilometers. This vessel isn't visiting; it's permanently stationed around Hotfire. Called *The Dunce,* it's unofficially the dullest duty Firewall has to offer. The crew is made up entirely of biomorphs without cyberbrains. No infomorphs, pods, or synthmorphs are permitted onboard, and no one from Hotfire is permitted onboard. All electronics and software on the ship are also limited. No muses or any software above the level of extremely limited AI are allowed. Even XP and software capable of running XP or other realistic simulspaces are prohibited. I'm told that reading, gambling, and playing electronic games created at least 30 years before the Fall are all popular on *The Dunce*. I hope I never have to find out about any of this in person.

The Dunce is in charge of monitoring all sensor feeds from Hotfire. These feeds are intentionally low quality, with limited colors, low resolution, and poor sound quality. All of our research on basilisk hacks indicates that *The Dunce* is incapable of transmitting any basilisk hack to its crew. If the crew notices suspicious behavior on Hotfire, they are required to check in with everyone stationed there. If the answers are sufficiently off, if anyone or anything on Hotfire attempts to attack *The Dunce* or the dock, or if Hotfire attempts to launch or broadcast anything to the rest of the solar system, *The Dunce* is equipped with four fusion bombs. One should be sufficient to destroy Hotfire and vaporize the dock.

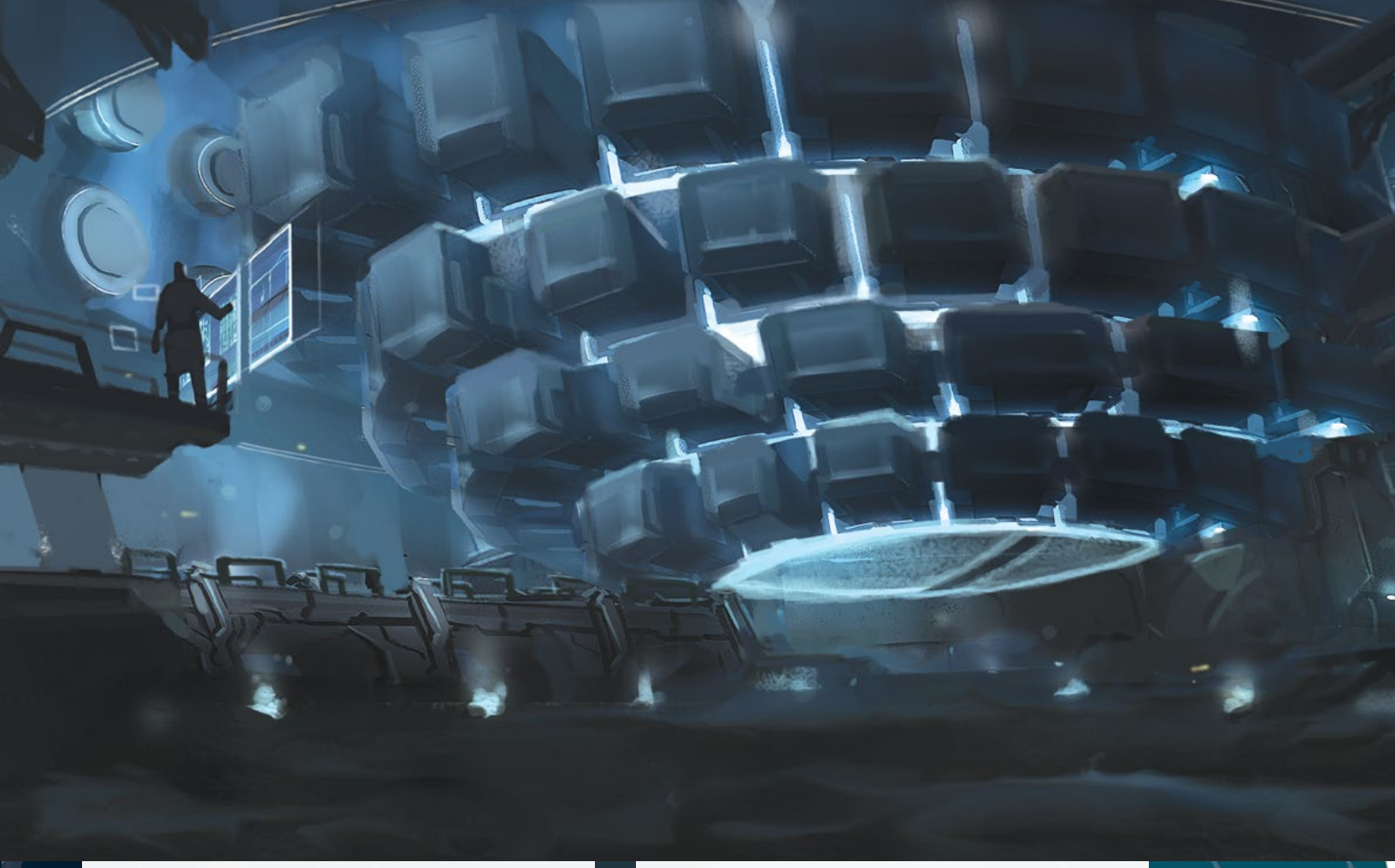
There's one other bit of security to keep in mind: this entire facility is not merely secret from everyone outside of Firewall. Everything except the fact that it exists is kept secret from everyone who isn't part of the pragmatist faction. We get invaluable results from Hotfire, but a fair number of Firewall operatives would shut us down in an instant.

REDOUBT

Classification: TOP SECRET / FORCED RETIREMENT EYES ONLY
Source: Instructions for Redoubt Monitoring Duty

Congratulations, you've been assigned to check on what we all sincerely hope to be one of the most pointless places Firewall has ever built. Redoubt is a marginally habitable exoplanet around a small orange star roughly 17,000 light years from Earth that's accessible via the Fissure Gate. Three teams of gatecrashers loosely associated with Firewall were assigned to locate suitable worlds for refuges, and four years ago one of these teams discovered this planet. When the team reported their results, some vectors falsified the report of this gate address so that it appeared to lead to a large asteroid that orbited a pulsar and so was regularly blasted with extremely high levels of radiation—in short, a destination no one would ever bother to visit a second time.

Soon after its discovery, construction began on the location known only as Refuge B. This site exists as one of a handful of final and exceptionally secret holdouts for humanity. Each refuge is



slightly different, so we have the maximum chance of avoiding whatever destroyed transhumanity in the solar system.

Refuge B is a cavern slightly more than half a kilometer below the surface in a tectonically stable region. It's roughly circular, with a diameter of 4 kilometers and a height of 1 kilometer. The interior took three years to complete and is based on the same nanotech used in Hamilton cylinder habitats. The original tunnel has been filled in, so there is no easy access from the cavern to surface. No energy emissions from it reach the surface. Even if a horde of exsurgents swarm though this planet's gateway after eradicating transhumanity, our hope is that they won't see anything worth destroying.

There's a decent chance that you're already in Refuge B—or, at least, a fork of you in cold storage. Over two million egos are stored here, a small fraction of which are Firewall operatives. Remember how you agreed to allow Firewall to keep a backup of you in case you and all of your more standard backups were destroyed or compromised? This is one of the places they keep a set of those backups. There are also a few volunteers backed up here—their egos donated by allies that were approached by our operatives for this purpose. The vast majority, however, are egos that Firewall otherwise "acquired." Most of these were rescued from derelict habs or soul-trading rings, though a substantial chunk are infugees from the Fall that never found a hab willing to take them. Others are drawn from cortical stacks Firewall has collected from various instances and other nebulous sources.

The purpose of your visit is to conduct a periodic check-in. Once a year, we transmit a trigger signal to the refuge via a QE communicator. This signal activates a drone that digs up to the surface, carrying a communication cable. This cable is used to establish a hard-wired connection to a set of air-gapped equipment within the refuge. Your beta fork will be transmitted to the refuge, where it can sleeve into a synth. Your job will be to review the facility logs and make certain that everything there is functioning appropriately. You'll also download a new batch of data via the comms cable that includes updated data on transhumanity and new egos for storage.

REDOUBT

Type:
Terrestrial (Habitable)

Primary Star:
K5V

Gravity:
0.73 g

Diameter:
9,500 km

Atmospheric Pressure:
0.6 atm

Atmospheric Composition:
Nitrogen 81%, Oxygen 18%

Surface Temperature (Mean):
8 C

Day Length:
42 hours

Orbital Period:
140 days

Satellites:
3

Gate Access:
Fissure Gate

This data is stored on computers that are physically separated from the local network, so there's no chance of any harmful software contaminating Refuge B. The goal of these reports on major events of interest in the solar system and technological developments is to hopefully provide the people stored in the refuge with hints of the possible trouble that led up to their being awakened. After you check the systems and store the new data, your fork will transmit back up the cable, which will then be buried again until the next check-in.

While you won't remember any of this, if things ever fall apart in the solar system, you'll hopefully wake up here. If no one visits the sanctuary for 50 years, Refuge B activates, growing or constructing bodies for 500 stored Firewall operatives who then review the records left by the last visitors and decide what to do next. The most likely next step is then to start waking everyone up and bringing the refuge up to full operational status. Currently, Refuge B has facilities to house approximately one million individuals sleeved in morphs and several times that number of infomorphs, and it can expand as needed. It also contains complete backups of all recorded human knowledge as well as templates for all known technologies and lifeforms as well as almost 100 large cornucopia machines. Accidental activation is possible but very unlikely, so if Refuge B ever activates, either something drastic has likely happened in the solar system or gate travel to Redoubt has for some reason become impossible.

SALVAGE ZONE: THE EARTH GARAGE

Classification: SECRET
Location: High Earth Orbit

This particular garage is located in Earth's orbit and is a very useful way to get close to Earth without anyone outside of Firewall knowing where you are going. The entire facility is licensed as belonging to Salvage Zone, a Firewall-front hypercorp, which serves to keep the facility exceedingly private.

A four-person server maintains this operation. They include Zeenat Dutta, an Indian-born aerospace engineer; her partner, Nurmi Marsini, a former Indonesian fighter pilot; and Nuts and Bolts, a pair of machine AGIs sleeved in synths. When not maintaining their semi-profitable scrapper and ship repair venture, they keep an eye out on developments of interest to Firewall among local scavengers, reclaimers, and orbitals. They have a solid base of clientèle who rely on them for repairs, including many who rely on off-the-books transactions. They frequently bring in vacworker temps or spin off multiple forks to handle larger jobs.

The Salvage Zone is a fully equipped Firewall safehouse and darkcasting terminal with a limited stock of biomorphs as well as facilities for manufacturing most standard synthmorphs. It typically holds between one and several dozen morphs that were left behind by other operatives who egocasted from that facility, though some are held in reserve for their owner's return. Don't expect much in the way of bedside manner, though; Zeenat and Nurmi have too much on their plates to babysit folks who farcast in. The proxies here also maintain a healthy cache of weapons and gear, including a fair number of vacsuits and other items salvaged derelict ships and habs.

Most importantly, the Salvage Zone contains respectable docking and repair facilities for shuttles and smaller-sized spacecraft. Though their shipyard isn't large enough to handle ships like standard transports or bulk carriers, they are optimized for working on courier spacecraft and even maintain limited quantities of antimatter for refueling. The number (and working status) of ships currently on hand varies, and not all of them belong to the Salvage Zone crew, but the server is normally able to provide LOTVs or couriers for important Firewall ops or can at least arrange discreet transport with one of their clients. They also tend to keep some courier or other spacefaring morphs on hand for recon and other solo flight purposes.

Zeenat and Nurmi are very careful with their ships. They won't send expensive antimatter-powered ships to land on Earth or to dock with habs run by well-armed smugglers. These ships are to get you to suspected exsurgent outbreaks if there's some gear that you absolutely need to take with you and you don't think you can acquire there. Zeenat and Nurmi are great resources for sentinels who need help putting together a plan. They've done everything from sleeving an operative in a creepy and letting it ride a radar-reflective tank of compressed nitrogen from the ship's closest approach to reach a hab, to faking a minor cargo accident and jettisoning a couple of sentinels in a heavily stealthed life pod amidst a cloud of debris. They can also arrange for stealthed re-entry capsules if you need to visit Earth. Of course, you'll want recent backups or an emergency farcaster for any mission like this, because they're not going to be able to do much to help you get back out.

THE TOYBOX

Classification: CONFIDENTIAL

The Toybox is one of Firewall's better-known storage depots. Unlike our various gear caches and scratch spaces, the Toybox is not the place to get run-of-the-mill weapons or gear. The Toybox is where Firewall stores artifacts that are deemed useful and not immediately or immensely dangerous, as well as other hard-to-get limited-resource items that sentinels might occasionally need. These "toys" are securely stored until their use is requested or required for a sufficiently important mission.

The Toybox is impressive as one of the best examples of cross-faction cooperation. The pragmatists founded it, but agreed to some important reforms after serious objections were raised by

many conservatives. As a result, more extensive testing is conducted to make certain that nothing here is too dangerous or currently possible to duplicate with transhuman technology. Also, as a compromise, the facility is now staffed by members of the backup clique.

THE FACILITY

The Toybox is located in the Main Belt. Its specific position is only available to operatives with COVENANT ARK clearance.

The facility itself is a disguised beehive habitat, hidden to outside sensors. Concealed weapons platforms guard the approach vectors. Should an enemy find the entrance tunnels, they still might be thwarted by explosives charges that could effectively destroy all ingress routes, effectively burying the facility under tons of rock. Though it could be accessed eventually, the delay would hopefully provide Firewall with enough time to organize a response. Inside the asteroid, the Toybox's collection of relics and equipment is safely sealed away and stored inside multiple chambers. As a last ditch resort, these too are wired with antimatter bombs to prevent the contents from falling into enemy hands.

In order to protect its location, ships are discouraged from docking at the Toybox unless absolutely necessary. Instead, items assigned for pickup are launched into space, on a matching speed and trajectory that enables a passing ship to scoop it up. Drop-offs are handled similarly, using low-signature missiles to transport and deposit gear from passing vessels.

THE COLLECTION

The Toybox is not apocalypse-mart. It does not contain any weapons of mass destruction, self-replicating nanotechnology, basilisk hacks, or anything similarly dangerous. Except for a few weapons capable of long range or almost traceless killing, the Toybox doesn't store weapons, because those are exactly the sorts of advanced technologies Firewall doesn't want getting into other people's hands. Instead, it specializes in unusual artifacts that produce effects impossible by other means. If you need a device that can do something inexplicable but mostly harmless, like prohibiting certain frequencies of the EM spectrum from entering or leaving a particular area, providing low-power reactionless flight, or reducing the inertia of a single person-sized object, they may well have something that you can borrow. Almost everything here is well beyond our current understanding, and we aren't likely to understand it anytime soon. A few of the devices stored here are unique, but we have as many as several dozen of some items, mostly pieces of alien technology like the fixor.

REQUISITIONS

Firewall operatives can request to borrow items from the Toybox. If you have an important problem you don't know how to solve, and you can afford to wait a few weeks or more to solve it (or by some lucky chance you happen to be near the Toybox), you can contact the Toybox via the Eye. Your request must include a detailed description of your problem and what you need to solve it, as well as why this problem is important to Firewall. If the Toybox server thinks your situation is important enough to warrant their

THE VENUS RETREAT

To: [Encrypted]
From: [Encrypted]

OK, you've been on this little logistics op for a week now, and it's time we came clean about a few things. I'm sure you've seen enough by this point that you're bursting with questions.

Here you are, one of the top network engineers in Firewall, helping us cobble together a series of well hidden top-end servers that have insanely high broadcast bandwidth to every place on or orbiting Venus, not to mention the farcaster links to elsewhere in the solar system. You've seen the data transmission stats. Those are unbelievably fat pipes, and we're pushing them to the limit.

You've also seen the processor hardware. We're not just running distributed systems. We're operating honest-to-Jupiter supercomputing clusters, the type of hardware that has been on the proscribed list for a decade. And we're still having a problem managing the load.

You're not stupid. You can put two and two together.

You've been with Firewall a few years. Surely you've asked yourself a few questions—the same questions we all ask. How are we doing such a great job preventing others from hacking the Eye? How do our scanners get access to all of the data sources we've tapped into? How do our vectors seem capable of hacking just about anything in the solar system?

We're good, but not that good. And we sure as hell ain't that lucky. So that means one thing. We have … backup. Friendly backup.

While your cycles process that thought, consider a few other things you've surely also noticed. Those firewalls and virus scanners aren't just top-of-the-line, they're the best we have. They are generations ahead of what's in use elsewhere. And, yeah, those fail-safes are exactly what you think they are. If there's a serious breach, this whole place goes boom. We can't risk our friends catching a cold, after all.

Rest assured, our friends don't live here. They aren't even here all of the time. They don't take those kinds of risks. These are temporary digs. They're a necessary risk, though, as the light-speed lag issue means we need them close enough on hand to deal with things more directly on occasion.

Hopefully this doesn't freak you out too much. You wouldn't be the first to have second thoughts. You might feel a bit better if you knew the full story … but we'll get to that. For now, what's important is that you have a grasp on the real situation. Our job here isn't just to keep things running smoothly; it's to keep an eye on our friend. If anything goes wrong, it's up to us to pull the plug. ♣

aid and if they have any technologies that might help, they will let you know. Alternatively, if you know about a particular item that is stored there and believe it would help your situation, then you can request it. An updated list of equipment and their known effects is distributed via the Eye to routers, registers, and crows with PLAYTIME clearance.

Note that requisition requests must be vetted by your server. This is sometimes problematic if your server is populated by conservatives or if the other proxies do not share your conviction that help from the Toybox is needed.

If the request is granted, the Toybox will work with your server to arrange a pick-up and a later drop-off. Toybox equipment is only released to Firewall agents, who then assume responsibility for the item. We don't trust these artifacts to courier services. In some cases, gear has been loaned to servers or operatives on a long-term basis (several eraser squads operate with scour rings, for example), or items currently deployed in the field are transferred directly to the next server that needs them.

Toybox equipment is expected to be returned in working condition. If it isn't, they require a full report. If you claim the device was destroyed and don't provide the remains, they may even go so far as to request an examination of your memories, depending on your i-rep and how well your story is collaborated by other evidence. These items are rare, special, and usually cannot be fixed or replaced if lost or damaged.

Acquisitions

The Toybox server is always looking for new devices to add to their catalog. They originally started as a pragmatist project collecting artifacts related to the TITANs and exsurgents, but most of those devices were either utterly baffling or far too dangerous to allow anyone to use outside of carefully controlled conditions. Though the facility still has a few of these artifacts, most of the unknown and dangerous relics have been transferred elsewhere or destroyed. Now, the Toybox focuses on items that are relatively reliable, safe, and potentially useful. Many appear to violate physical laws, others have capabilities no transhuman understands, but for the most part these items function in ways that fit into our understanding of how the universe works. Everything stored in the Toybox has clear instructions for use, a description of what it can do, and warnings about what not to do with it.

If you uncover an interesting artifact while gatecrashing or exploring ruins from the Fall, the Toybox server would love to see what you have found. In exchange for a chance to examine your find, they'll provide you with a detailed analysis of the artifact—or will help to contact other crows who can. Once they've analyzed it, however, they will follow standard Firewall protocols. They'll keep items that are appropriate for their collection, transfer others for further research or vault storage, or quarantine and destroy items deemed too dangerous.

Notable Operatives

Source: Unknown

Friends,

As requested, here is everything I have on anyone involved with this so-called Firewall group. The data is compiled from numerous sources—as an info broker, I'm sure you understand I cannot reveal my sources. I have verified what data I can, but of course in this business there are many secrets, many half-truths, and many things left untouched. Use your best judgment.

A word of warning. The people behind this group are … trouble. They've come after me before for selling dossiers on their agents, and I'm sure they will again.

Aun Leung

Real Name: Aun Leung
Known Aliases: Aun Bleu, Anne Blau, Ang Lán
Known Affiliations: Blue Mars, Black Mars
Server: Unknown
Role: Register, Crow, Router
Specialty: Robotics, Nanotech
Age in AF 10: 42
Primary Location: Circumneptunian Space

Leung was a researcher affiliated with the Blue Mars x-risk group. Her team was lost on a fact-finding mission to what is now the TITAN Quarantine Zone on Mars, uncovering TITAN activity in the process. The governments of the major Martian settlements saw to it that Aun Leung's discovery was quarantined, her and her research team's backups impounded, and Blue Mars banned. In response, a militant wing called Black Mars assembled, vowing to resist. Both Blue Mars and Black Mars were crushed by the authorities during the Fall; Leung's backups were all seized in the process. Firewall now believes these egos are all in the possession of Project Ozma. Leung has long-since been restored from an older pre-Fall backup by Firewall, but there is some concern over the memories of certain key operations that are now lost to Firewall but in Ozma's possession.

Leung currently alternates her duties within Firewall, operating mainly in the Neptunian and Neptunian Trojan regions.

Bainbridge

Real Name: Maddy Bainbridge
Known Aliases: Unknown
Known Affiliations: Bletchley Park, Argonauts
Server: Jörmungandr
Role: Crow
Specialty: AGI, TITANology
Age in AF 10: 99
Primary Location: Markov, Kuiper Belt

Bainbridge is one of Firewall's founding members, a pathologically brilliant researcher who went rogue from the UK's Bletchley Park organization to join forces with associates in the argonauts in the lead up to the Fall. Bainbridge is one of transhumanity's foremost experts on the TITANs. Whispers in the Eye credit her with being the first to sound the alarm that the old US military's pets had gotten out of hand, and from there working aggressively to recruit—by hook or by ego theft—many other founding members of what would become Firewall.

Bainbridge has very little contact with rank-and-file sentinels, as she now spends most of her time coordinating forks of herself on mesh-spanning research missions. What she learns guides the inquiries of counter-TITAN operations like GHOST RADIO. On the rare occasions she does appear—usually in simulspace conferences—she favors bespoke hyperbright morphs, pre-Fall scotch, and Savile Row tailoring that would cow the inner circle of Ozma. However, Bainbridge is known to have deliberately carved her mind into multiple personalities in order to work more efficiently. Proto-Firewall agents who worked with her during the Fall recall a disheveled, chain-smoking computer nerd in TARDIS slippers.

BENTO GELZER

Real Name: Bento Gelzer
Known Aliases: Zarathustra, Zebulon
Known Affiliations: Singularity Foundation, MIND, multiple hypercorps, Solarians
Server: Unknown
Role: Crow
Specialty: AI, CogSci, Mathematics
Age in AF 10: 145
Primary Location: Unknown

Gelzer is widely considered to be the god-person of AGI. With degrees in mathematics, computer science, and cogsci, they were involved with several corporations that helped set the groundwork for early AGI research. They applied some of their early AI work towards stock market predictions, eventually making enough to buy their own small, private research hab at one of the Lagrange points (destroyed during the Fall). Gelzer co-founded the OpenAI project, an open-source initiative that released a number of critical AI software tools and engines to the world. As the research director for the Singularity Foundation, Gelzer was a vocal proponent for friendly AI and spearheaded the drive to create the first AGI. They are known to have consulted with MIND on their 100 Flowers network.

Gelzer is known as a bit of an eccentric. They retain some of their pre-Fall wealth and maintain

FIREWALL'S GENERATION GAP

Posted By: Magnus Ming, Proxy

One striking thing about Firewall's proxies is that we're almost all clustered in late adulthood—the time of life that pre-immortality humans called "middle age." The hyper-aged are nearly absent from our ranks, as are the Spring Children who've come of age in the years since the Fall. The youngest among our ranks, those in their late thirties and early forties, are exceptional people, those who've chosen to make Firewall their life's work. This generation gap is both a good and a bad thing. Good, when it keeps us suspicious of the machinations of our elders. Bad, when it makes us dismissive of the younger people in our ranks. ☘

connections with various hypercorp researchers and hyperelites. Their viewpoints are staunchly in the argonaut camp, however, and they spend a lot of their time in autonomist spheres, holding an affinity for their viewpoints. They have undertaken several solo gatecrashing "walkabouts" and are considered a friend in several Solarian surya pods. Gelzer adheres to a non-binary third-gender identity.

BLACK PHARAOH

Real Name: Unknown
Known Aliases: Whisperer, Cici, Mr. Skin, Randy Flagg
Known Affiliations: Unknown
Server: Unknown
Role: Scanner, Vector
Specialty: X-threats, Restricted Info
Age in AF 10: Unknown
Primary Location: Unknown

Reports on the operative known as Black Pharaoh and the Whisperer describe a loner with connections to numerous Firewall servers who has an uncanny knack for bringing critical information to the table for ops that they should have known nothing about. Though the information brought forward by Black Pharaoh has saved many operations, the Pharaoh's touch is considered cursed by some agents due to the number of times it has led to unforeseen complications, often making matters worse. Research indicates this person is an independent maverick info-broker, possibly one of the best in the solar system, with an impressive personal back-market data service with clients in both the inner and outer system. There is some evidence to suggest that certain elements within Firewall do not trust Black Pharaoh; these are concerned that Pharaoh's loyalties are sometimes divided and so they are not always acting in Firewall's best interests alone.

BRANDEN DEGRASS

Real Name: Branden DeGrass
Known Aliases: U+05D0
Known Affiliations: Institute for a Transhuman Future, Argonauts
Server: Mystery Two
Role: Crow
Specialty: Neuroscience, Future Studies
Age in AF 10: 138
Primary Location: Extropia

DeGrass was a spokesperson for the Institute for a Transhuman Future, providing major contributions to the public discussion of human enhancement and new technologies, particularly in regards to ethics and societal ramifications. He suffered some unfortunate media fame when he was kidnapped and murdered by an Islamic bioconservative sect before the Fall; thus becoming one of the first generation of people to be restored from their backup and resleeved in the early days of such technology. He was an early ally of the argonauts, and is credited for helping draw many of the proto-Firewall factions together during the Fall.

In recent years, DeGrass has solidified his support for the structuralist camp within Firewall, arguing that the group has more to gain by taking their agenda aboveground and creating alliances with major factions. Favoring transparency over clandestine operations, he has turned to the argonauts, Titanians, and others when his projects have been stymied within Firewall. He works with Case MYSTERY, tackling major questions of ethics, and in a way continues to serve as Firewall's conscience.

CACOPHONOUS

Real Name: Unknown
Known Aliases: Lorelei
Known Affiliations: Anarchotech, Love and Rage Collective
Server: Mayday
Role: Scanner, Router
Specialty: Autonomists, Gate Ops, Infosec
Age in AF 10: Unknown
Primary Location: Outer System

Cacophonous was part of the early wave of autonomist colonists to the outer system, building refuges and habitats outside of the reaches of governments and corporations. A techie with a range of skills and scientific interests, she helped organize the Anarchotech Network, which eventually allied with the argonauts and early proto-Firewall groups. After the Fall, she was part of an autonomist gatecrashing op through the Fissure Gate that discovered a TITAN

cache on a previously unexplored exoplanet. Though they handled the situation, it drew Firewall's attention and Cacophonous was soon read in. More recently, Cacophonous has become involved with the Love and Rage Collective's operations, serving as one of Firewall's main contacts there and listening for news of interest from gatecrashers returning from the field. Cacophonous has built up a rep as a competent outer-system router, increasingly taking on a vocal role within Firewall's internal politics. Considered part of the pragmatist faction, her efforts seem geared toward increasing cooperation and info-sharing within the group, though her disdain of Jovians and biocons has earned her some detractors. She has also supported the position that hypercapitalism itself constitutes an x-risk.

CALLOSUM

Real Name: Unknown
Known Aliases: Unknown
Known Affiliations:
Server: Unknown
Role: Crow, Filter
Specialty: Neuroscience, Mind-states, Neurodiversity
Age in AF 10: Unknown
Primary Location: Venus

Callosum is a neuroscientist suspected to formerly have worked with Cognite (or perhaps an unauthorized alpha of a current Cognite citizen). They have helped Firewall develop internal protocols for identifying exsurgent influence and hardening cyberbrains and protecting virtual mind-states against attack. Various second-hand accounts imply that Callosum has worked with a number of neurodiverse sentinels and proxies, providing psychosurgery therapy and enhancement of atypical capabilities.

CONRIK TOMBS (BETA)

Real Name: Conrik Tombs
Known Aliases: Tombstone, Rik Deux
Known Affiliations: Institute for a Transhuman Future, Autonomists
Server: Mystery One
Role: Crow
Specialty: X-Risks
Age in AF 10: 143
Primary Location: Main Belt

Before the Fall, Tombs was regarded as one of the world's foremost philosophers regarding existential risks and the future of transhumanity. With degrees in philosophy, computational neuroscience, and theoretical physics, Tombs was a vocal proponent of restricting the development of technologies with high x-risk potential and accelerating the creation of technologies that increased our chances of survival as a species. He was a founder member of several x-threat, futurist, and transhumanist groups, including the Institute for a Transhuman Future. Tombs was killed early during the Fall, with all of his backups destroyed; evidence suggests that he was specifically targeted by the TITANs due to his views. A beta fork survived, but was not granted legal status in several polities forcing Tombs to relocate to an autonomist colony in the Main Belt.

Tombs plays a grandfather-ish role within Firewall, working with several crow servers and advising various proxies and servers on how best to approach various existential threats.

DAS FRETTCHEN

Real Name: Charles Chesler Searle III
Known Aliases: Too Many To List
Known Affiliations: NSA, CIA, Llewelyn's Offworld, Extropians
Server: Unknown
Role: Eraser, Router
Specialty: Black Ops
Age in AF 10: 99
Primary Location: Valles-New Shanghai, Mars

An Anglo-American public school and spook chum of Bainbridge's who some of the Eye's more progressive elements wish had never been brought into the fold, Das Frettchen (aka, "The Ferret") is nevertheless Firewall's go-to when a mess needs cleaning up with extreme prejudice and no one else has the stomach for it. Searle worked for various intelligence agencies before striking it rich in the insurance business. Old fashioned, bigoted, and unapologetically classist, Das Frettchen is staunchly Extropian in outlook and Catonian in embodying Firewall's conservative nuke-it-from-orbit clique. Not quite an oligarch himself, he moves in the same circles and has access to some of the most powerful people on Mars. Searle is extremely well connected in the big Martian cities and is especially proprietary—in a way that infuriates many—toward Valles-New Shanghai.

ELUDERE

Real Name: Sun Nikiforova
Known Aliases: Marusya
Known Affiliations: Roscosmos, Various Smuggling Crews
Server: Unknown
Role: Sentinel
Specialty: Smuggling
Age in AF 10: 38
Primary Location: Inner System

An original colonist of Korean-Ukrainian descent, Eludere's crew turned to smuggling when budget cuts left them unsupported. Over time, they became one of the most experienced smuggling outfits in the inner system. During the Fall, they were hired by one of the pre-Firewall configurations to take on jobs that had to be handled outside of normal channels, and later

devoted themselves to supporting the evac effort—particularly assisting groups that would otherwise have been abandoned. Most of her crew paid the price, dying in various actions; their backups were also lost when the orbital they were stored on was taken by the TITANs.

Eludere continues to maintaining a viable smuggling operation, operating around the restrictions of various inner system polities, while still supporting Firewall efforts on the side. Though she is known to deal in shady goods, she has supported Firewall efforts to sniff out anything x-risk related. Her expertise has always been beneficial on numerous inner-system operations, helping to insert or extract both sentinels and necessary gear.

It is worth noting that Eludere's rep score has seen some fluctuation, in part due to raising a few flags with autonomists over red market deals. She is also known to be hostile to working with Extropians, after several deals went sour.

Felicity Costa

Real Name: Felicity Costa
Known Aliases: Sustenatrix
Known Affiliations: Lifeboat Institute, Argonauts
Server: Unknown
Role: Crow, Register
Specialty: Sustainability, Survival Contingencies
Age in AF 10: 68
Primary Location: Unknown

Dr. Costa served as the Chief Operating Officer of the Lifeboat Institute decades before the Fall and was publicly outspoken on the topics of increased human presence off of Earth, the use of seed ships, and unsustainable public policies. Even as a founding member of the secretive Firewall, her presence on the world stage was not diminished. Since the Fall, she has transitioned to working primarily within Firewall and is a strong proponent of the backups clique. She rotates through servers, normally spending only a few weeks in each, to host discussions with proxies and routers on streamlining operations. As someone who puts each server's success over her own politics, she's well-regarded throughout the organization.

Ham

Real Name: Shoshona Bar Kokhba
Known Aliases: Unknown
Known Affiliations: Israeli Defense Force, Lifeboat Institute
Server: Vindhlér
Role: Scanner
Specialty: Earth
Age in AF 10: 76
Primary Location: Earth Orbit

Ham oversees Operation CENOTAPH, Firewall's program of surveillance over the ruins of Earth. Originally an Israeli signals-intelligence expert, Ham decamped for the world of think tanks and private foundations during the decade prior to the Fall. She spends virtually all of her time in the field—in Earth orbit, keeping watch on the desolation below. Skeptical about the effectiveness of operational planning without a formal command-and-control structure, she's part of the structuralist movement in Firewall. On the rare occasions sentinels make forays to the surface, Ham is on high alert, one eye on orbital surveillance, one finger on a tac nuke.

Jake Carter

Real Name: Jae Park
Known Aliases: Carter Napier, Carson Park
Known Affiliations: Tharsis Terraforming Office (freelancer)
Server: Sola
Role: Router
Specialty: Martian Outback, TQZ
Age in AF 10: 38
Primary Location: Martian Outback

Jake is a Mars-born Korean agridome redneck who's worked variously as a terraforming line technician, a smuggler, a courier for the Barsoomians, and a Firewall asset. Carter is politically aligned with Firewall's outer-system autonomist wing, but he's Martian to the core. He knows the Martian countryside like no one else—he's probably driven over half of it—and is equally well-connected with its people. His cover identity as a Tharsis League terraforming engineer provides connections with the League's army of civil servants, as well as wide latitude to pop up where he pleases. Carter is unusually hands-on for a proxy, using his personal connections to provide operational support for missions in the Martian countryside and not shying away from his own fieldwork or the occasional in-person meeting with sentinels.

Magnus Ming

Real Name: Magnus Ming
Known Aliases: Les Merci
Known Affiliations: North Atlantic Consortium Titan Colonization Mission, Argonauts, Titan Autonomous University
Server: Debug
Role: Router
Specialty: Computational Archeology, Xenocomputing
Age in AF 10: 70
Primary Location: Titan Autonomous University, Aarhus, Titan

Ming came to his present passion for computational archeology and xenocomputing late in life. He began his career as a hacktivist, moved on to planetary colonization advocacy, and from there won a position as a leading software engineer with the

NAC's first mission to colonize Titan. A longtime argonaut, Ming brought his considerable infosec skills to the aid of other Firewall founders during the Fall. He led the team that developed the first scanning tools that could reliably detect the exsurgent virus, and his research into its digital strains is one of the first things hackers newly cleared for intel on the virus read. In his public, academic life, Ming's research focuses on xenocomputing and data archeology, particularly into the rare examples of Iktomi computers that periodically surface. Privately, he helps guide research into the abandoned TITAN matrioshka brain beneath Iapetus. As a colonist of the First Settlement, Ming has close ties to Titan's original luminaries and sometimes serves as a back channel for communications between Firewall and the Commonwealth. Among proxies, he's usually considered part of the pragmatist clique.

Moxie Harper

Real Name: Caroline Ma
Known Aliases: Katie Koncussion, H Bomb
Known Affiliations: Red Star Taxi Cab Service, Martian Lady's Flattrack Roller Derby Association
Server: Three Bridges
Role: Sentinel
Specialty: Noctis-Qianjiao, Martian (Sub)Culture
Age in AF 10: 28
Primary Location: Noctis-Qianjiao, Mars

Harper is an aircab pilot who works the bustling skyways of Noctis-Qianjiao, while freelancing as a cool hunter and roller-derby player. She came to Firewall's attention when she beat an exsurgent senseless with her utilitool in the back of her cab after he tried to skip out on his fare. The Firewall agents who'd been trailing him were impressed and kept tabs on her afterward. When Ozma took an interest, they got her out of harm's way and offered her a job. Harper has an intimate knowledge of Mars's numerous and vibrant subcultures and trends.

Nevermore

Real Name: Lenore Kraa
Known Aliases: Pallas Roost
Known Affiliations: Mercurials
Server: Unknown
Role: Sentinel
Specialty: Piloting, Infiltration
Age in AF 10: 16
Primary Location: Unknown

Nevermore was a brilliant young neo-corvid training as a shuttle pilot and studying for degrees in engineering and physics on Venus when a chance encounter with a rogue exsurgent left her forever changed. Firewall brought her in for evaluation and to help her understand her new async abilities, eventually recruiting her. Her piloting skills, knowledge of habitat design, async talents, and the training she's received from Firewall make her incredibly useful for infiltration ops. She is known, however, for exhibiting a degree of recklessness, illustrated prominently in a recent run where she broke the cordon around Earth. If you want to catch up with her, log in to Alien Raider. She's a guild leader for the Murder Squad and leaves a fork logged in almost constantly.

Nezumi

Real Name: Trace Hume
Known Aliases: Rodentia Obscura
Known Affiliations: Scum
Server: Stardrift
Role: Scanner
Specialty: Solar System, Transhuman Factions, Ego Hunting
Age in AF 10: 34
Primary Location: Nomadic

Nezumi is a Firewall operative that has embedded themselves in several different scum swarms, traveling the solar system and cataloging the various factions, interactions, and curiosities they come across. A former ego hunter on Earth, Nezumi survived as an infugee during the Fall, was rescued by The Stars Our Destination scum swarm, and hasn't looked back since. Nezumi often embeds forks with various communities to learn about their workings in detail and reintegrates these forks later, with the help of expert scum psychosurgeons. Nezumi has employed their ego hunting skills on Firewall's behalf several times, and has foiled the plans of several singularity seekers operating within scum circles.

Nova Vida

Real Name: Nero Morozov
Known Aliases: Composite Directive
Known Affiliations: TerraGenesis, Love and Rage Collective
Server: Unknown
Role: Sentinel
Specialty: Gatecrashing Ops
Age in AF 10: 37
Primary Location: Portal

Nova Vida has probably logged more gatecrashing time than any other Firewall operative. A pre-Fall merc, they won one of the early lottery slots for a mission through the Pandora Gate. They then leveraged this experience into further operations for various hypercorp interests. In AF5, they encountered an exsurgent threat and were introduced to Firewall through another member of their team. Since then, they have continued to work gate ops with various parameters, first through the Vulcanoid Gate, and more recently through the Fissure and Portal Gates.

PARALLAX

Real Name: Kerala Gavde
Known Aliases: KillBot 3000, Steel Simham
Known Affiliations: National Security Guard, Ultimates
Server: Unknown
Role: Eraser
Specialty: Sniping, Special Ops
Age in AF 10: 41
Primary Location: Unknown

Trained in special ops, with a focus on sniper skills, Parallax formerly served in India's National Security Guard in counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency operations. Prior to the Fall, he joined Ultimate Security, becoming a disciple of Manu Bhattacharya and serving in numerous mercenary actions around Asia. Whether or not he was involved in any of the incidents for which the ultimates were accused of war crimes remains unclear. When the war with TITANs broke out, Parallax split with the ultimates (some claim he had a personal disagreement with Manu himself) and rejoined the NSG. He was deployed on numerous missions behind enemy lines, acquiring a substantial amount of direct experience with TITAN machines and operations. As a result, as the situation deteriorated Parallax was assigned as a liaison to an ad-hoc group of international researchers seeking to undermine the TITAN threat. When his command structures evaporated during the final days of the Fall, Parallax organized one of the holding actions that bought precious extra days for people to escape off-world. Though he was killed, the scientists he worked with escaped (along with his backup) and became founding members of the Eye and Firewall. Since then, he has continued to work in a military support role for Firewall's operations, primarily working with various erasure squads to ensure total annihilation of various threats.

PIVO

Real Name: Unknown
Known Aliases: Pulpo Omega
Known Affiliations: Mercurials
Server: Unknown
Role: Sentinel
Specialty: Scavenging, TITAN Tech, Nanotech
Age in AF 10: Unknown
Primary Location: Earth Orbit

Pivo's origins were lost during the Fall. What we know is this neo-octopus has been involved in various scavenging operations in the inner system, primarily focused around Earth orbit. Along with his partner, an AGI known as Berk, the pair found themselves in possession of certain TITAN artifacts which they attempted to sell on the black market. Firewall busted the deal, then recruited the duo to help track down the rest of the relics—and the buyer who was collecting them. Though they still engage in scavenging operations on the side, Pivo and Berk have become regular operatives for Firewall. Pivo's particular skills are subverting technology of all stripes; his exposure to TITAN technology through ongoing missions is rapidly making him into an expert on the subject. He has bypassed the interdiction and visited Earth on at least one occasion since the Fall, though he did not survive the experience.

For reasons unknown, Pivo is actively pursued by certain segments of the Night Cartel—likely due to a black-market deal gone bad. Several attempts to claim the bounty have so far failed. Pivo is also known to be a vocal supporter of both reclaimer and mercurial causes.

PYRRHOS

Real Name: Constantinos Alexandropolos
Known Aliases: Too Many To List
Known Affiliations: Hellenic Police, Interpol, Medusan Shield
Server: Ghosthunter
Role: Crow/Router
Specialty: Identity Theft, Infosec, Slavers
Age in AF 10: 54
Primary Location: Progress, Mars Orbit

Originally from the ranks of the Greek national police force, Pyrrhos gained a rep at Interpol for busting up human-trafficking rings before throwing his lot in with Gorgon Defense as an intel agent during the Fall. These days he's an executive at IndEx, the Planetary Consortium's registry of indentured egos. From his position as a legal slave trader, Pyrrhos has a dual crow/router role in watching over the illegal ones. He coordinates infosec teams monitoring slaver activity, while also running field teams in ops against the gangs. Pyrrhos usually falls in the maverick faction of Firewall. From cutting deals with the ultimates, to working a hypercorp job that profits off indentures, to running Operation TRAFFICKOP (which is deeply controversial within the Eye), he's far from the model citizen exemplified by some proxies. So far, though, his results are hard to argue with.

QI

Real Name: Unknown
Known Aliases: Too Many To List
Known Affiliations: Barsoomians
Server: Thark Life
Role: Vector
Specialty: Infosec, Intrusion
Age in AF 10: 22
Primary Location: Mars

The hacker known as Qi has surfaced many times in connection to Firewall operations. Morningstar has issued an arrest warrant for her involvement in the hacking of aerostat control systems and the Planetary Consortium lists her as a "person of interest" regarding several instances on Mars. She is known to be a supporter of the Barsoomian Movement and is

responsible for several high-profile hacks that exposed corporate misconduct, indentured slavery schemes, suppression of dissidents, and corruption. Aside from her capabilities on the mesh, she is known to be an avid producer of electronic music.

ROKUZAWA CHI

Real Name: Rokuzawa Chi
Known Aliases: Chi, Ro, Chiro, Mememe, Summa
Known Affiliations: Rokuzawa Technical Fabrication, Carnegie-Mellon (Mars), Titan Autonomous University
Server: Unknown
Role: Filter
Specialty: Neuroscience, Psychosurgery, Forking
Age in AF 10: 45
Primary Location: Titan Autonomous University, Aarhus, Titan

A native Martian, Chi was born male in Noctis pre-Fall to bioconservative parents that were part of the early colonization. Her family was majority owner of Rokuzawa Technical Fabrication, a split-off venture from an Earth-based megacorp whose other pieces were eventually cannibalized by Fa Jing: RTF played a part in developing the space elevator and early construction of Olympus, so the family was an early part of the Martian hyperelite. Chi was spoiled, freely pursued her passions, and indulged in hedonistic dabbling in forking and thrill-seeking to spite her parents' bioconservatism. She studied in the neuropsych department at Carnegie-Mellon, where her wanton forking first took on a more serious tone, eventually growing into an interest in multiplicity. After her degree was finished, her alma mater and other universities were too conservative to support her proposed research, so she used the wealth she inherited on her parents' passing to fund herself. She reached further outsystem to partner with institutions for academic publication, which led to her eventual association with TAU.

Chi came to Firewall's attention when a fork of her was caught up in the fringes of the Aptos singularity cult/exsurgent outbreak in AF4. She helped plan and execute the operation to end the group and was brought into Firewall thereafter. The recruitment encapsulates why she's valuable: she has personal connections and is an approachable link to groups that are potential x-threats, she has in-system corporate and social contacts that aren't always common in sentinels, and her talent for gathering humint and working in cover and social infiltration is a rare match with her scientific knowledge. She is a radical thinker, with all the good and ill that entails.

There is some concern that Chi is sympathetic to singularity seekers, even if what she's pursuing is an individual and personally generated transcendence. She grounds her work in good science and produces results, but bears watching. Her forking habits are near obsessive or addictive levels, and although she's borne the mental strain of them amazingly well, her habitual use of high-end morphs and a suite of modifications to help her regulate her awareness could become a weakness if she's required to be unsleeved or placed in low-quality morphs for long periods. It's worth noting that only some of Chi's forks are aware of and involved with her Firewall activities; the rest know nothing.

RUQINZHE

Real Name: Unknown
Known Aliases: Too Many To List
Known Affiliations: ID Crew
Server: Unknown
Role: Sentinel
Specialty: Infiltration, Hacking
Age in AF 10: Unknown
Primary Location: Circumsaturnian Space

The operative known as Ruqinzhe is an expertly trained infiltration specialist. They are known for gaining access to Invatch's R&D labs, high-level ultimate comms networks, the Titanian Ministry of Defense's orbital defense grid, and the private vaults of several secure hyperelite estates. Their methods vary from physical B&E to social engineering and sophisticated mesh intrusions. Though they have been known to work with other sentinels, it is widely suspected that Ruqinzhe operates primarily with multiple forks of themself. While Ruqinzhe offers their services to Firewall, they are known to pursue their own agenda from time to time, usually "liberating" high-value one-of-a kind artifacts for resale on the black market, though there have also been several instances of leaking proprietary code and nanofab designs to public networks.

SAVA

Real Name: Unknown
Known Aliases: Sava Rockatansky (Unconfirmed)
Known Affiliations: None
Server: Unknown
Role: Sentinel
Specialty: Special Ops
Age in AF 10: 40
Primary Location: Unknown

A freelance security consultant before the Fall, Sava was one of a handful of survivors of a deadly TITAN attack on a habitat in Earth orbit. Driven by a seeming need to understand and gain revenge for this tragedy, Sava sought out information on the TITANs and eventually made contact with Firewall. Sava has been a prolific sentinel, working with many different servers and sentinel teams. Despite numerous reprimands for taking action beyond the scope of the operation, Firewall continues to regard Sava as one of their top sentinels, with a wide range of useful skills, an eye for detail, and an ability to get the job done despite the odds—and often despite the costs to their

own person and team. Sava's continued obsession with tracking down the activities of specific TITANs has been flagged as anomalous and problematic, but the operative is seen as too valuable to remove from active duty—and might even pose a problem if cut loose.

SHOMARI MIRZA

Real Name: Shomari Mirza
Known Aliases: Breeze
Known Affiliations: Shui Fong Triad
Server: Unknown
Role: Sentinel
Specialty: Assassination
Age in AF 10: 37
Primary Location: Unknown

Little is known about Mirza's pre-Fall history, other than that he served as a foot soldier in some southeast Asian warlord's militia. Somehow this work got him vetted into the Shui Fong Triad, who brought him off-world to protect their assets right before the evacuation went into full swing. Over the next few years, Mirza became one of the triad's top hit men, until one of his targets turned out to be an exsurgent. A Firewall team tracking the threat bailed him out, but not before Mirza suffered a mental breakdown. After coaxing him back, Firewall made him an offer to extract him from his former life and give him a job taking out monsters like the one he had encountered. He signed up and hasn't looked back. Mirza is a staunch supporter of the conservative faction within Firewall.

SUN BU'ER

Real Name: Akila Dimaguiba
Known Aliases: Sun Fuchun
Known Affiliations: Fortean Geneticists
Server: Exile
Role: Crow
Specialty: Genetics, Exhumans
Age in AF 10: 51
Primary Location: Fortean

A geneticist focused on fertility and germline engineering before the Fall, Dimaguiba lost three children and both her wife and husband during the evacuation. On Luna, she found new work in the field of gene therapy with compatriots of (not-yet-infamous) Dr. Yu Ping Dalton. During this time she was the first to assess a group of patients infected with a new exsurgent strain variant. Through quick thinking, she recognized and managed to contain the risk, preventing an outbreak. Firewall, tracking the situation, recruited her.

After working for several years as a crow and black market body-modder, Dimaguiba volunteered to relocate to the exoplanet colony of Fortean, where she is responsible for monitoring the rogue geneticists there—and Dr. Yu Ping Dalton specifically. Though she has taken no actions to compromise her loyalty to Firewall, certain proxies have grown alarmed at her growing sympathies to Dr. Dalton's philosophies—and exhumanism in general.

TARA YU

Real Name: Tara Yu
Known Aliases: Unknown
Known Affiliations: Titan Autonomous University, Titanian Ministries of Defense and State
Server: Unknown
Role: Crow
Specialty: Infosec, TITANology
Age in AF 10: 39
Primary Location: Titan Autonomous University, Aarhus, Titan

Yu is a protégé of Magnus Ming and one of Firewall's chief experts on Iapetus. During the Fall, she was a scientific advisor to the Titanian Ministries of Defense and State on dealing with hostile activity on Iapetus. She was one of the first scientists to do field research into the dead matrioshka brain beneath the moon's surface and, with Ming and others, has co-authored a large amount of analysis on the subject. Much of this work is classified by Fleet Intelligence, but available to high-rep proxies due to Yu and Ming's dual loyalties. Yu has also done field work as part of Operations FULGENT TERMITE and GHOST RADIO, aimed at recovering TITAN hardware for analysis. This work puts her in the pragmatist camp of Firewall, in opposition to the conservatives who would prefer to see all such discoveries promptly destroyed.

TIO SILENCIO

Real Name: Silvestre Guerrero (Speculative)
Known Aliases: Unknown
Known Affiliations: Society of Jesus, Uruguayan National Intelligence Directorate
Server: Ad Majorem Transhomini Gloriam
Role: Router
Specialty: Jovian Republic
Age in AF 10: 62
Primary Location: Circumjovian Space; exact location unknown

Tio Silencio is a difficult proxy to assemble a dossier on. There are at least six people, most of them members of the Jovian military or intelligence establishments, who might be Silencio. We'll focus on the most likely candidate: Silvestre Guerrero. Guerrero started out as an agent in the Uruguayan National Intelligence Directorate during the period known as the Uruguayan Dominion, during which Uruguay's social-democrat government commanded wide-ranging influence over affairs in Central and South America. When the Dominion-era government collapsed in BF 30, Guerrero retired from the foreign service and took orders, eventually becoming a Jesuit priest. His technical qualifications lead to an

assignment as an aide to the papal nuncio to Jupiter. In this role, Guerrero became an anti-x-risker, leading an inquiry into unchecked use of AIs in gas-mining operations. It's around this time that the name Tio Silencio starts to appear on anti-x-risker forums, making cautious inquiries regarding various scenarios for machine-life outbreaks. Silencio's posts indicated a special interest in machine life threats in the rimward part of the solar system, leading to speculation that he was from either the Belt or Kronosian space. Silencio's identity remains a matter of speculation even within Firewall, but his track record of exchanging information and support with proxies in other polities has made him a trusted asset despite his total anonymity.

VIOLET PERDIDO

Real Name: Violetta Ospina
Known Aliases: Unknown
Known Affiliations: University of Bogota Pharmacy College
Server: Elysianistos, The Invisible Word (rumored)
Role: Filter
Specialty: Elysium, Epistemological Threats
Age in AF 10: 44
Primary Location: Elysium, Mars

Ospina was a programmer and AGI pedagogue whose job when the Fall happened was programming the pharmacological expert systems embedded in doctor bot AIs. Revived as an infugee, she took an indenture contract as a sex worker on Mars because it offered the shortest time (at least on paper) to a new body. Ospina developed a clientèle that gave her access to a large number of powerful people in Elysium, an influence that only grew once she paid off her indenture and could pick and choose between clients. She began passing information to the Barsoomians and was recruited by Firewall when one of these tips led Barsoomian-affiliated Firewall agents to a black AI lab run by Experia. Violet Perdido was just recently promoted to proxy, where she continues to dig dirt on the doings of the big media hypercorps. She's also connected to rumors about the Invisible Word, an alleged secret server within the Eye whose mission remains unknown.

VOIGHT-KAMPFF

Real Name: Unknown
Known Aliases: Graystone, Program Zero
Known Affiliations: Center for Disease Control
Server: Unknown
Role: Router
Specialty: Disaster Prediction
Age in AF 10: Unknown
Primary Location: Unknown

According to sources, Voight-Kampff is an AGI uplifted from a disaster-prediction program written by the old-world CDC. As part of its uplift, an experimental kinesics program was integrated into V-K's code, intending to bolster its (it being its preferred pronoun) personal interaction skills. The resultant effect, however, was a personality that is essentially borderline sociopathic: aware enough to read emotions and manipulate others, but lacking actual emotional empathy.

In line with its inherent proclivities towards predicting calamities, V-K found itself working with pre-Firewall researchers in seeking positive outcomes to the war with the TITANs. Later joining Firewall, V-K has become a skilled router, described by some as one of the hottest in action. It has been commended for its prescient ability to have needs in place almost before sentinel teams ask for them. However, it should be pointed out that V-K primarily looks at the big picture. The needs of individual sentinels are weighted less in its algorithms, meaning it prioritizes getting the job done over the health and well-being of its field agents. As one sentinel has noted, if the router deems the risk of fielding more or heavier equipment to a team is worth it, then that team is probably in deeper trouble than they realize.

YEMAJA

Real Name: Elodie Martin
Known Aliases: Unknown
Known Affiliations: Solaris
Server: Unknown
Role: Register
Specialty: Logistics, Markets, Infugees
Age in AF 10: 25

Before the Fall, Yemaja was an AGI quant (a polite way of saying "math geek") employed by Solaris. Though sleeved in pods for face-to-face interactions with clients, one internal review described her as having "the cuddly personality of a cranky koala." During the evacuation of Earth (and the rise of anti-AGI sentiment), she simply walked away from Solaris and tracked down a proto-Firewall cell, offering to help. Her answer to both "How did you find us" and "Why do you want to help" was simply: "I did the math." Yemaja saved thousands of egos during the Exodus by coordinating the hardware (willingly donated or not) to transmit, receive, and store uploaded egos.

Yemaja remains with Firewall to this day, wielding considerable logistical influence. Not only has she been able to conjure financial support for Firewall projects out of vacuum, she's even made some selective stock picks with her private funds that had sizable returns, all of which she donated to Firewall. Even a decade after the Fall, she continues to track down lost egos as a side project, regularly "encouraging" various habitats to find a new batch of infugees squirreled away in the depths of their cold storage. Some have suggested that this hobby may in fact be motivated by unstated intentions, though who or what Yemaja is fishing for is anyone's guess.

ZORA MÖLLER

Real Name: Zora Möller
Known Aliases: Volta, de Cleyre, Kanno Sugako
Known Affiliations: Cienfuegos Revolutionary Anarchist Movement
Server: Black Rose
Role: Sentinel
Specialty: Saboteur
Age in AF 10: 26
Primary Location: Mars

Möller is an active component of what some might call Firewall's "anarchist problem." Her primary activities involve working with CRAM cells to sabotage hypercorps and instruments of capitalist society. She is considered a terrorist with numerous bounties issued by various inner-system polities. Recruited into Firewall after a mission to expose a hyperelite oligarch unveiled an exsurgent infection, her allegiance to Firewall's mission clearly takes second seat to her revolutionary priorities.

RELATIONS WITH OTHERS

Posted By: Francis Wu, Firewall Filter

<Info Msg Rep>

In service of Firewall, we travel the solar system, meeting strange and exotic people and ways of living—and many of those people will attempt to kill you. Unless your goal is to tour transhumanity's interrogation simulspaces, it's worth your time to learn a bit about those with whom you're brushing elbows and tentacles.

I know it says that Firewall is a secret organization on the brochure. In practice, it only seems to be secret from those who don't care to know anyway. Almost every political body in the solar system is aware of our existence and has SOPs on how to deal with us. Fortunately, most of them are "in on the secret" and don't care to publicly recognize us or work against the stories we market to the public. The motivation for this varies from organization to organization and actually can be quite telling. One thing seems to be near-universal, however: a Firewall sentinel, if captured, is a treasure trove of information. Avoid that if you can, dears.

ARGONAUTS

The argonauts and Firewall are fellow travelers. We share many of the same concerns and work towards many of the same goals. Like most good siblings, however, we have our disagreements and scuffles.

The argonauts are essential to Firewall in two ways. First, they provide an ongoing ethical guiding voice. The argonauts serve as transhumanity's scientific conscience. They guide and shape the public discourse on the responsible, cautious use of technology. They address in the open the ethics of our scientific progress, super-empowering technology, and technoprogressive issues such as accessibility, democratization, and quality of life. They help steer public policy in ways that Firewall itself can't. Secondly, they provide the research and scientific resources that Firewall is often unable to bring to bear on its own. A significant portion of our crows are argonauts, and the work they conduct for Firewall operations is often at the expense of the argonauts' own studies. The relationship is not one-sided. Firewall frequently investigates on behalf of the argonauts, when their research unveils potential dangers and threats. Most of the argonauts within Firewall are pragmatists and backups, though the other factions are represented as well.

We have also had to work *against* the argonauts on a few occasions. The degree to which Firewall monitors and responds to argonaut incidents may at first seem surprising, considering the argonauts take a strongly precautionary stance of their own against x-threats. Investigations into the argonauts are not always easy; they can close up ranks with the best of them. The truth is, if you were to take a count of skeletons in closets, I think you might find the argonauts show a per capita surplus. The nature of their research, on the very extremes of transhuman knowledge, means that they are prone to tripping over x-risks (and I do mean tripping over; far more rare is the planned and expected discovery). They've had an unfortunate number of scientists get *too* involved in their work; and some of these have gone off the reservation. We've had to put down several that engaged in projects that crossed the line into exhuman and TITAN threats. Sometimes the scientists know they're crossing the line; they tend to cover their own tracks by spinning off forks and sending them to a secret laboratory to finish their forbidden work. Unlike corporate labs, where dozens or hundreds of individuals provide support, these maverick scientists normally leave very little evidence of the fork heading into the field. In some cases, the alpha forks themselves have been the ones to tip us off about their errant fork's projects.

Firewall also tends to have a fundamental disagreement with the argonauts over freedom of information. Firewall is in the business of keeping the lid on dangerous things. The argonauts are all about making everything public; their argument is that the more widespread the knowledge, the more transhumanity is capable of defending itself. This means that argonauts are often inclined to share information under the aegis of responsible disclosure, whether it involves a manufactured nanoplague or a widespread exploit in fusion reactor control systems. Naturally, more conservative members of Firewall balk at providing the recipe for an x-threat to the public, so servers are pressured to investigate and resolve x-threats before the argonauts do (and to hide or destroy all of their research).

Finally, it's worth addressing the persistent rumors that circulate between proxies claiming that the argonauts have their own pet ASIs. This ugly rumor keeps

surfacing in various incarnations, sometimes claiming that the argonauts are manipulated by a remaining TITAN, other times insisting that the argonauts have tamed their own ASIs using good wishes and fairy dust to protect us from the TITANs. Each time these rumors have been discredited. There is truth to the suggestions that some argonauts (and current Firewall members) were researching friendly AI before the Fall, and the argonauts continue to research and analyze possible applications of this today—but without instancing actual super-intelligences. It would be best for all if these rumors were treated with skepticism.

Autonomists

Autonomists are nice people. It's unfortunate when we have to kill them. I mean that sincerely; a majority of autonomists live in very small, closed habitats. Unfortunately, that means when they trip over an x-threat, the entire population is quickly exposed to it. When Firewall arrives, our sentinels are highly vulnerable to being discovered. If these poor souls survive the x-threat, we sometimes have to exterminate them anyway to protect Firewall's secrecy or to properly destroy said x-threat. It's very unfortunate when it happens. I know that sounds trite, but it's true; these autonomist habitats tend to have minimal security, but they're very effective at recognizing outsiders and are loud in social media. The best bet is to have a solid backstory going in and avoid raising eyebrows, because if you make waves, well … to proxies of the break-a-few-eggs school of thought, a few hundred egos in a tin-can habitat barely even registers. With larger autonomist habitats, that isn't an option, but fitting in is far easier.

Both the Fissure and Portal Gates are common stops for Firewall missions, as gatecrashers are always bringing in odd things. Fortunately, we have a strong presence at both locations, and most autonomists who know of Firewall are friendly to our presence. We have established especially good relations with the Love and Rage Collective, leading to a mutually beneficial exchange of information and resources.

Brinkers

Practically by definition, brinkers don't maintain relationships with anyone. Still, they are literally the edge of transhumanity. That isolation and line of expansion permit all sorts of weird things to crop up, and it's Firewall's job to fix situations that go sideways. Remember that out on the fringes (even through the Main Belt, a measly 6 AU in diameter), there is no strong authority. That means if Firewall doesn't settle things, no one will. Unfortunately, in most cases, those communities are too far for Firewall to provide support in time. In those cases, we can perhaps offer written guidance and alert everyone else in the area to stay away.

Firewall does still try to maintain strong relationships with these hold-outs. We're well-represented on several brinker stations, especially Whiskey. We even have ongoing connections with several brinker, religious, and survivalist radio stations and mesh

sites that we use to establish rapport, share alerts, and get feedback from isolates. It's an odd position to be in, distributing how-to-guides on repairing batteries and reaffirming that the Iktomi love you so that we can also push an email warning for suspected exsurgent infection.

Criminal Organizations

Firewall is on a mission to save transhumanity from extinction. How far are you willing to go to make that happen? Are you willing to die for it? Kill for it? What about work as a soul trader for it? Would you run addictive substances for it? Kidnap innocents for it? Rarely is our conflict with criminal organizations one of power or money; it's one of ethics. Firewall maintains lucrative relationships with a range of criminal and grey organizations. We swap smuggling services, security information, and threat data. The fact is, as far as most political blocs are concerned, the only difference between Firewall and Night Cartel crawling behind the bulkheads is the crunch we make when they stomp us. This makes us allies by necessity. In some situations, it is strictly a financial arrangement. In others, our criminal comrades are actually altruistic. We've received significant no-strings support from groups such as the Sun Yee On triads, and even some wealthy soul-traders from Nine Lives. Of course, that requires that you accept the charity and company of a piece of transhuman excrement who trades cortical stacks as a matter of convenience and reputation. All but the most pragmatic members of Firewall think twice about associating with someone who makes a Consortium senator look straight. This poses a significant problem for our relations, as a self-righteous sentinel can permanently burn a critical contact. It falls on the routers to carefully select and control their assets to avoid such a faux pas. If a sentinel requires a memory wipe after the mission is completed, that can be arranged. Firewall does not have the luxury of derailing its mission for the benefit of a few slaves. The weight of all transhumanity is too much for us to take that on as well.

No less controversial, Firewall is in the business of acquiring WMDs and TITAN artifacts as they appear on criminal markets. This is a major point of dispute within Firewall. Those who support purchasing items outright note it encourages sellers to be more open about their wares, providing Firewall with critical information on the artifact and the circumstances of its discovery, as well as ensuring future sales will be detected in time to be intercepted. The contrary argument is that purchasing these items encourages the capture and sale of these items and drains critical Firewall resources. Regardless of the method of acquisition, Firewall spends plenty of time building relationships in markets and scum barges. For the most part, keeping our organization secret is trivial. Instead, our relationships are built on specific individuals and fronts. Because of disagreements regarding the question of purchase vs. steal, a certain amount of inter-Firewall conflict carries on in these theaters. Expect that your most difficult conflict isn't with the uranium dealer, but with the crow from another server trying to goad you into either conforming with their preferred philosophy or abandoning the theater altogether.

Hypercorporations

Most of our interactions with hypercorp actors are antagonistic. If you are familiar with the hypercorporate x-threat watch list, you'll know it's quite a long text. Most of the big names are familiar with Firewall and take a zero-tolerance policy to our intruding, even when it is in their clear best interest. Their profit plan includes creating x-threats, and that means it's our job to put them out of business. In some situations, hypercorps find it smarter to simply cut their ties to a site and carefully direct us to it. If they've cleaned up anything we might use for future operations or that might result in bad publicity, letting us handle the deadly alien artifact is just a smart cost-saving measure. When our business is less intrusive, hypercorps tend to be amiable to some degree of cooperation. Our social engineers can share threat data, the status of survivors, and after-action reports and expect that the hypercorp in question will at least improve their safety measures in the future. Of course, the hypercorps rarely take the initiative in sharing information with us unless there's a clear profit motive for them. They know we're offering something for nothing, and "gratitude" is not in the hypercapitalist's dictionary.

Occasionally, our interactions are more sympathetic. Most hypercorps working with x-threats have contingency measures in place. A few aggressively seek out and neutralize x-threats, such as the Olympus Infrastructure Authority who maintains part of the TQZ border. Even organizations that have nothing to hide usually push back against Firewall playing in their sandbox. Expect our teams to be dealt with as they'd handle any other armed intrusion. Our filters have it easier. The exchange of threat data is mutual and, if the stars align, Firewall can even receive an unofficial sanction to respond to the threat directly.

Firewall does maintain a stable of friendly hypercorps; corporations we own a significant share in, fronts we've established to conceal our operations, or cases where we've established a relationship with someone high enough to support our activities. Oversight does not approve of corporations conspiring with autonomist terrorist organizations, so operations through these corporations are kept strictly hush-hush. Unless the front is disposable, everything must maintain plausible deniability at every step. These people are true supporters of our work, but are operating deep in enemy territory. Treat these people with respect.

There are also a select few hypercorps that have the foresight to recognize x-threats as bad for business *and* the willingness to make it a budget item. Of the

majors, only ExoTech falls into this camp; they've initiated their own anti-x-threat ops and have even brought situations to Firewall's attention on occasion. The corps that are pro-active in this manner should also be respected, but the best policy is to interact with them much as we do with our rivals and frenemies with government backing: keep our distance, share intel when necessary, and limit our exposure.

Jovian Republic

If there's one thing the Jovians have truly mastered, it's how to back themselves into a corner. I can appreciate that; very Sun Tzu. My issue is they play all-in with every single confrontation. Today it's nanotech, tomorrow it will be population stagnation. I haven't yet figured if it's an intentional act by government to keep their people scared and their military punchy or if it's just genuine risk-aversion. Most of my interactions with Jovian assets have followed the same philosophy. They hire fanatics—true believers. It's unfortunate, as in other ways the Junta are our closest allies. No other political body has as strong a stance against x-threats. They don't resell TITAN technology, and their nanoplague facilities are simply remarkable.

Firewall has a tendency to undersell the Jovian intelligence services. The belief that Jovian spies don't resleeve or use nanotech is naïve. Remember, Jovians believe these technologies are deadly, but the people selected for the intelligence services have no issue with laying down their lives for the good of their nation. Firewall is lousy with Jovian assets, and very few of them are so gross as to stay in their natural-born flat. I can only speculate on their purposes. Currently, Firewall is more of a thorn in the Consortium's side than the Republic's. Is that forestalling a shadow war with the Republic? Or is it the result of Jovian embedded assets nudging Firewall's focus?

Whatever the case, care must be taken when conducting ops in Jovian territory. The official line is that we are a terrorist organization operating outside the law, and they'll treat us just as they would any other threat.

Lunar-Lagrange Alliance

It seems a prevailing view among Loonie Firewall servers is that they are a separate entity from the rest of us. The first response is often to assume classism is just as strong in Firewall as anywhere, but the truth is they are simply following a meme common through the Lunar and Earth-orbiting habitats; a meme that lets them be effective at their work. For many people in the region, they still consider themselves to be the true home of transhumanity. That pride, combined with significant wealth and cultural influence, plus strong isolationist tendencies, has resulted in an insular and egotist cultural vibe.

In order to operate in that environment, our assets must be able to belong to that meme. Our most effective proxies are part of established families. They host débutante balls for their children. They make public appearances at concerts. Of course, their vocation and sources of income are kept secret, but to be effective they must be recognized as part of the community. Scores on reputation networks and financial resources don't count nearly as much as membership in the old-boys' club. If they don't know your family name, you are just another member of the clanking masses.

Why does Luna operate differently? In addition to the pride of being the cradle of our species, they are still haunted by regular encounters with TITAN remnants, highly virulent infections, dangerous alien artifacts, and most other forms of x-threats Firewall was created to deal with. They maintain significant military facilities, most habitats have rigid immigration and quarantine requirements (if immigration is permitted at all), and formal and community watch programs are standard practice. Lunar x-threat management programs are sophisticated and effective, bordering on paranoid, and that constant yellow-alert stance has leeched into the common mentality as well. Outsiders are viewed with suspicion as possible vectors of disease. Clades, including cultural and national divides, are still alive and well.

As the situation changes, Firewall must adapt. Approximately three-quarters of assets on Luna stay on Luna for five years or longer, rotating between local servers. New assets are given a year to establish themselves before they're rotated out. When working in the area, recognize that, unless you fit in, you will face resistance at every turn. You simply aren't one of them and so your actions will be viewed with suspicion. I've seen some people play it up; the oafish tourist is permitted to break rules that would have more serious impacts on our established agents. Overall, however, you must recognize that building up trust in order to put those you are working with at ease is the first priority.

Because of the limited rotation, Lunar and Orbital servers lean heavily towards the backup and structuralist cliques, with most others having been effectively pushed out—or at least taught to keep quiet. Working with our Firewall assets, we frequently encounter more poignant and colorful disputes than is common elsewhere—they have an established way of doing things. It may not always be the best or most effective, but recognize that it is tested and venerated. Understanding and respecting those local norms and avoiding any talk of politics except to express agreement, are useful lubricants to social contact.

Morningstar Constellation

The Morningstar Constellation is a paradise in free fall. When it comes to x-threats, they don't want to see it, they can't see it, and while they will share it, they won't talk about it. The Constellation's focus on operating like a loose confederacy has resulted in limited centralized security administration and no specialized security force to speak of. Morningstar federal security forces focus more on crimes between habitats or enforcing laws regarding politics.

Few of the habitats have the training and resources to handle infections or TITAN attacks. Strangely enough, perhaps the strongest resource Firewall has to draw on when operating in Venusian space is the criminal cartels, who maintain private tactical security forces for their own use. Less of a concern is the Morningstar policy of transparency. Firewall is already used to operating under cameras, and the panopticon just makes it easier for our vectors to verify their hacks worked.

Attempts by Firewall to push the Constellation into adopting a more effective security force have met with resistance. The fact is, there's a movement to forget about our troubled past, and that meme has a stronghold on Venus. Venus is the only inner planet without confirmed TITAN activity. Meanwhile, the aerostats floating far above the surface are enjoying a cultural and economic renaissance, with their token looming threat of a Consortium coup. Most residents survived the Fall and would prefer to keep those memories buried, and their elected representatives are all too happy to help them.

At this point, the primary Firewall missions on Venus are infiltration of key positions and education. Infiltration is managed through swapping of services, positioning our crows, and establishing alliances. Firewall has no interests in the Consortium/Morningstar conflict, other than making sure it doesn't turn into an x-threat situation, which gives us some degree of free range, though meddling of external actors is always cause for some alarm. Education is executed with an equally subtle hand. Exsurgent infection is still a common trope in media, so our social engineers work with simulspace writers to include factual data and appropriate responses (or awful ends to those who respond poorly) in hopes that it will disseminate into the cultural knowledge base. On the average, Venus sees limited x-risk activity, so a more passive and preventative approach is warranted.

OLIGARCHS

The wild card in solar-system relations is the oligarchs. These individuals throw around an inordinate amount of weight, and their motivations are difficult to pigeonhole. To them, the solar system is little more than an elaborate game for them to build or break to their whim. Many people are familiar with the project to reform a rocky exoplanet into a two-septillion-ton bust. When you personally own 2% of all of transhumanity's currency, the only limitation is patience. When dealing with an oligarch, it's easy to forget you're dealing with an actual person; a transhuman with fears, curiosity, and pride. The same oligarch who is keeping a collection of alien WMDs as a memento mori may be attracted by the secret-agent mystique of working with Firewall. If I could only share one thought, it's that these ladies and gentlemen are far smarter, far better prepared, and far stranger than any other transhuman you are ever likely to encounter.

PLANETARY CONSORTIUM

The Consortium is a nest of snakes gradually consuming their own eggs. The hypercorps are dying, and both our and their analysts know it. Putting long-term sustainability ahead of quarterly profits means you won't be around long enough to enjoy the fruits of your labor. The best they can hope for is to seize enough resources and maintain a hungry enough profile to survive the big crash. Unfortunately, this leads to a situation familiar to students of the twenty-first century. Profiting off of climate change nearly gutted the entire system when it threw survivability of the species into question, and all the corporate PR only dug us deeper. The new economy is similarly set for long-term existential threat, if it survives that long.

More immediately, enforcing a scarcity economy has made it a zero-sum game. My success can only come from someone else's loss. Each hypercorp is pitted against its neighbor, and each employee is pitted against their employer. The alliances that make up each hypercorp and the Council as a whole are only possible when there are bigger targets available; usually the public. This means cooperation between corporations is highly reactive to market conditions, with alliances breaking and forming (usually secretly) in response to every spike and drop from the market index. Even the apparently unassailable Council will only survive as long as the profits continue to come in.

OVERSIGHT

The Consortium's Four-Point Plan is somewhere between a non-binding constitution and a marketing pitch, documenting their commitment to helping protect transhumanity and spreading to the stars. It's comforting to assume the plan is a commitment by the Consortium and its members to stop all x-threats. Certainly, the Consortium will address anything so gross as a TITAN attack, but in reality the Four-Point Plan has nothing to do with the majority of x-threats we face. Instead, the Four-Point Plan is a thinly veiled attack against its competing economies, especially the autonomists who show the most promise of long-term economic stability. It's a banner of the new nationalism as the Consortium works to undermine autonomist authority and open those populations for market exploitation. The lesson is, the Four-Point Plan will do nothing to stop x-threats created by the corporate members of the Consortium, and is a war cry for the ongoing Consortium/autonomist conflict that is undermining the overall survivability of the species.

Officially, the Consortium's weapon against x-threats is Oversight. In reality, Ozma addresses most of the interesting x-threats, with Oversight focusing on those existential threats posed accidentally or intentionally by hypercorp projects (and not officially sanctioned by the Consortium Council). I cannot think of anybody in the solar system I am more loathe to work with. Oversight is the big dog in the Consortium and they know it. Their auditors operate without legal or ethical limitations. Unlike the hypercorps, who are

willing to compromise with Firewall when there's cash on the line, Oversight makes a point of killing and interrogating Firewall assets every time, no exceptions. The stories of Oversight sending a communique to known Firewall servers that was laced with a basilisk hack is an urban legend, but they *do* stuff their emails with memetic attacks, malware, false flags, and any other destructive hacks they can fit in.

Project Ozma

I like to consider Ozma our richer, meaner half-brother. They have all of the money, all of the toys, all of the access, and they don't share. The rumors are true; Ozma kills a lot of Firewall sentinels. What your router won't tell you is we lose more to Ozma recruitment offers. It's true, Ozma actually pays their agents, but it's important to remember what you're working for. When Firewall leaves the scene, the threat is contained or eliminated. When Ozma leaves, the threat is brought to a hypercorp-owned lab for further study and development. Firewall could pay our agents too, if we were willing to sell our souls for it.

Reclaimers

Reclaimers are easily dwarfed by the other factions, but they make up for the small headcount with the sheer amount of trouble. Reclaimers (as well as singularity seekers, zone stalkers, and similar types) have made it their driving goal to pull down those quarantine zones keeping the TITAN war machines tucked away. Initially, Firewall expected to make strong headway in reclaimer communities. We exchanged data and offered resources to help contain threats. But even the most liberal members of Firewall were not fast enough to meet the desires of the most ardent reclaimers, and the reputation of our agents fell as they were seen as stodgy anchors. Now, Firewall operates at the fringes, relying on a few conservative accomplices, plenty of involuntary scanners, and heavy sifting of their mesh shadow.

The current situation is a testing ground for how utilitarian Firewall can be. Reclaimer operations are a threat, that is beyond a doubt. We work to eliminate or discredit the most aggressive and risky reclaimers. This isn't something that permits a soft touch; do half a job and the target just gets smarter. When Firewall decides an individual is too much of a threat to let free, the social engineers do everything we can to make it a clean break. It isn't just Firewall that holds this position. The Consortium, the biocons; everyone with a crowbar to swing is willing to disappear an overly ambitious artifact hunter now and again. The reclaimer movement is reacting by developing a deep paranoia. Every month, the artifact trade goes deeper underground and our contacts have less data for us to process. And every week, as memories of the Fall fade, the reclaimer ranks continue to swell. The end result of this pattern is predictable, but the political, ethical, and reputation issues around it tie the entire question into knots.

Titan

Yes, strong democracy, lots of space, and a healthy economy make Titan a great place to live, but working there is more like spy games in East Berlin. Every major clade has active interests in Titan, from upsetting, preserving, or modifying their politics, sabotaging perceived IP theft or committing technology re-appropriation, or old-fashioned military espionage. The conflicts are as you might expect; hypercorps versus microcorps, Jovians versus Fleet Intelligence, Tong versus Night Cartel, and everyone against Firewall. But the result is ever-shifting political lines as alliances of convenience between actors are created and dissolved. Titan's real-time direct democracy adds an extra burst of energy to the reaction, as partnerships are formed for literally minutes in order to sway voting blocs or push memetic blitzes.

Firewall maintains a working relationship with Fleet Intelligence, at least when we're operating outside of Titanian space. However, the Security Police are still holding a grudge over past incidents. While they do not, as a rule, subject Firewall operatives to interrogation or permanent ego death, they make it clear Firewall is not welcome. If a sentinel starts upsetting certain political or economic interests, however, they may be targeted for permanent removal. Those with ethics, such as the Titanian judiciary system or most of their established politicians, will work within the system to have interfering sentinels exiled. Others may pursue methods such as psychosurgery or framing for crimes worthy of ego erasure. Firewall avoids interfering with Titanian politics, but the stakes are high enough that experienced sentinels double-check. Know who you're working with, who you're working against, and what they've got on you.

Ultimates

Ultimates are what you get when you give an exhuman a code of ethics. When it comes to fighting x-threats and beating the odds, you can't ask for better. There are a few competing philosophies among ultimates as to the care of civilians, so be sure to establish those before the mission. Unfortunately, that same ideological rigidity that keeps them on our side of the exhuman conflict can also drive a wedge against Firewall. Ultimates will do it the ultimate way and if you try and derail that, you will be abruptly uninvited. These people expect no assistance. Negotiating cooperative projects with them is a test of one's humility. Investigating ultimate habitats is justifiably considered hazard duty.

One would think these people were fed interrogation from the crèche, given how hard they'll hold onto a secret. Their loyalty bonds to one another are as strong as fullerenes. Their risk tolerance is defined by years of throwing themselves into every meat grinder in the solar system. They consider Firewall a hobby club. As painful as our encounters with the ultimates are, thank the stars they're on our side.

NEUTRALS AND HOSTILES

Firewall is not the only anti-x-risk group in the solar system.

Hypercorps: Self-interest sometimes includes everyone's survival. ■ p. 123

Jovians: Alert to dangers, but hostile to technological progress. ■ p. 128

Oligarchs: Immensely resourceful … and completely untrustworthy. ■ p. 138

Religious Groups: Catholic allies and Islamic reclaimers. ■ p. 140

Ultimates: Experienced fighters with suspect beliefs. ■ p. 154

OTHER GROUPS

FRIENDLIES

Firewall's fellow travelers and allies … usually.

Argonauts: Focused on scientific responsibility, overlapping heavily with Firewa ■ p. 118

Titanians: Neutral, sometimes favorable, despite some bad blood. ■ p. 143

TITAN Hunters: Well-intentioned but potentially problematic. ■ p. 153

OTHER GROUPS

Posted by:
Cacophonous, Firewall Router <Info Msg Rep>

Firewall is by no means the only transhuman group concerned about x-risks. We have many fellow travelers, some of which are allies (the argonauts) or at least share enough common ground as to avoid interfering with each and sometimes even work together (the Titanians). Others are rivals with varying degrees of hostility, ranging from indifferent (the ultimates) to destroy-with-prejudice-upon-contact (the Jovians). It is not uncommon for us to cross paths with these groups in our investigations, though it is, of course, not always apparent what agencies these other operatives represent. Sentinels have been known to use some of these other groups as cover identities or as patsies to take the blame, and they assuredly do the same with us when convenient.

THE ARGONAUTS

Posted by: Dr. Karome Bensadaa Mbariko, Argonaut Researcher and Firewall Crow <Info Msg Rep>

The drama recurs across all samples of human—and now transhuman—society: the exertion of individual will against the prevailing authority. The toddler who pushes all rules boundaries, incessantly, until the parents are driven to distraction. The lone genius (or mad person, depending on one's perspective) who disregards the mores and standards of their age to produce shockingly original, yet fundamentally disturbing, works of art. The institutions that finally emerge from the shadows of authoritarian repression—whether based in religious, statist, or other dogmas—to bring the light of scientific progress and disruption to a benighted society.

In each case, the interplay between the inherent desire of the individual to defy authority, on the one hand, and the interest of the dominant power to maintain order and conformity, on the other, creates a dialectic that, over the long run, produces better (or, at least as the evolutionary biologists have it, "adaptive") results for (trans)humanity.

At least, that used to be true.

For most of history as we know it, the deck has been stacked in favor of Authority. If you fought the Man, you were likely to be ground into dust. If you fought and somehow won, it was likely because your ideas were better or their time finally had arrived.

But what happens when the pace of progress, as well as the suite of tools and technologies available to the individual or small collective outstrips the traditional techniques that power groups use to keep the masses in line?

In the good old/bad old days (before the Fall), a lone nutjob could blow up a building or shoot up a shopping center. A dedicated cell of insurgents could disrupt the infrastructure, cause panic, and generate fear—at least over a limited horizon. But technology had not, back then, advanced to the point at which a single rogue element could threaten the very existence of the human species.

Icarus might, in his pride and exuberance, fly too close to the sun and melt his wings. He would leave behind a grieving father and an object lesson. Today's Icarus might fly too close to the sun, plummet into it and spark a supernova, and thus wipe out the solar system.

KINDRED SPIRITS, UPHILL BATTLE

This precarious state of affairs is exactly why so many argonauts support Firewall and vice versa. Both groups embrace the belief that the survival of transhumanity—if such a thing is possible at all—must be a strictly DIY job. The tattered remnants of pre-Fall authority and the outmoded practices they embody cannot be entrusted with such a grave task.

Unfortunately for us, we face a difficult fact: specialization works, and well-run organizations that harness teams of hyperspecialists can accomplish far more than the most well-intentioned, hard-working, and community-minded generalists, amateurs, and part-time cowboys and crusaders.

True, you can point to counter-examples of savants who could step into one of many disparate roles, or juggle on the fly, and produce amazing results. And with today's augmentations and muses, one dedicated person can indeed tackle a lot—generating what might have seemed superhuman outcomes to pre-Fall observers.

But look at larger numbers of inputs—whether simple machines, advanced computers, or sentient beings—and larger-scale trials, and the data are compelling. Specialization wins; the cost is that the winning teams become corrupt, entrenched, abusive, undemocratic, and unaccountable.

Hence the problem facing argonauts and Firewall alike: as the groups mature and begin to lay down institutional roots, how to remain true to their animating ideals? To succeed, we need effective resource acquisition and allocation, internal discipline, coordination of efforts, and a self-critical eye for correcting our deficiencies. What we lack is time to figure all this out, because the threats that lurk in the darkness or hide behind pleasant smiles are ruthless.

Argonauts—at least, those who are in the know—tend to support the (stated) mission of Firewall: to keep transhumanity alive and kicking, no matter the threats. And Firewall tends to back the argonaut

(stated) project: to expand the frontiers of knowledge and make useful technologies freely available in service to the betterment of transhumanity.

When framed in these ways, it's hard to find a reasonable, educated, sane individual who would flatly deny the utility of these goals. "No, I don't want transhumanity to survive. And no, we have enough knowledge already, thank you very much." But we're not engaged in a rhetorical contest or forum flame war in which winning debating points will carry the day. And there are enough shades of meaning and grounds for disagreement that even people of good will can reach an impasse or simply throw up their hands and leave the bargaining table.

Neither Firewall nor the argonauts is monolithic; the differences of philosophy, opinion, and style create nuances of approach and allegiance that are as idiosyncratic as the individuals who comprise these groups. For our purposes here, we will focus on two key fault lines dividing each: the tension between secrecy and dissemination of knowledge, and the pull between cautious circumspection and decisive, timely action.

Secrecy vs. Disclosure

Despite the high degree of alignment of their overall interests, the argonauts and Firewall often disagree as to the best use of the sensitive information gleaned by their efforts. Argonauts are well known as vocal champions of the free spread of knowledge. They support open access to further their technoprogressive ideals and as a safety measure, to ensure that important data is not lost or hoarded by a select few who might be destroyed or otherwise compromised. Similarly, the more individuals are empowered with knowledge, the more they can collaborate on countering threats. By contrast, Firewall is by definition a conspiracy that lives or dies by its control of secrets. To the latter, especially the more cynical and pragmatic members, uploading the latest specs of a weapon in hypercorp development or incriminating vids of a powerful individual behaving badly is to throw away a tool that might be used to advance other ends, whether through direct application or as blackmail leverage.

This is not to suggest that the argonauts always disclose everything and Firewall always hides. It is more accurate to say that the argonauts strategically disclose, but tactically hide, and Firewall does the opposite. When argonaut researchers liberate hypercorp fabber specs and post them for all to see, it furthers their technoprogressive principles and shrewdly gains them new support. When they spread details on a new pathogen, they empower people everywhere with the means to counter its contagion. However, the argonauts have been known to embargo some data or discoveries from going public, at least until some security concerns have been worked out. Seeking a balance on responsible disclosure is not always easy, and is one of the few areas where argonauts and sentinels/proxies disagree.

Restraint vs. Action

The assorted scientists, engineers, and thinkers who have thrown in their lot with the argonauts already possess at least a baseline level of political awareness and engagement; the clueless, apathetic, or risk-averse ones never left the nest of the inner system powers. Knowledge creation is a powerful force, and one vital to the survival of transhumanity. The entrenched authority groups can't be trusted to be good shepherds of this gift.

After agreeing to these basic premises, the argonauts and Firewall are pretty simpatico and well down the road to cooperation. But applying these abstract tenets to a messy, chaotic, and rapidly evolving cosmos requires myriad judgment calls. The thorniest question involves the precautionary principle.

Simply put: if doubt exists as to the potential results of a course of action (such as a line of scientific inquiry and experimentation), does the burden of persuasion lie on those who raise the specter of harm—to demonstrate that bad stuff is more than likely to happen and is more than likely to be a material detriment to transhumanity? Or do the proponents of the untried actions need to prove that their road is safe before the community can sanction their efforts? In either case, what is the standard of proof: more likely than not (51 percent)? Or beyond a shadow of a doubt? And who decides?

Closely related is the question of when prudence dictates direct intervention, as opposed to remaining aloof from a situation.

Such legalistic and philosophical thickets can frustrate the most stalwart champions of progress. In many cases, those who might land in the argonaut/Firewall camp chafe at these constraints and depart for the fringe of the solar system, there to pursue research without interference. One can only contemplate, with dread, what might emerge from such inquiries.

Relationship Status: It's Complicated

Despite the disagreements and difficulties, the bonds tying together Firewall and the argonauts are deep and unlikely ever to sever. These links run all the way back to Firewall's founding moments, in which many argonauts played a defining role. In fact, there was discussion early on in some circles about whether to combine the groups. Ultimately, however, it was clear that each organization had its own priorities, and the pursuit of one was likely to interfere with the functioning of the other. While many argonauts retain dual membership, all mention of the Eye and Firewall has been carefully purged from the argonauts' archives.

It is an ongoing joke among many proxies that the argonauts serve as Firewall's unofficial "Science Division." There is, of course, a kernel of truth to this, as a significant number of crows work in argonaut labs and untold argonaut resources are diverted towards research and projects that further Firewall's ends. Making the situation complicated is the fact that many argonauts remain completely unaware

of Firewall's existence, much less the shared ties. Sentinels and proxies that move within argonaut circles must take care whom they communicate with and how they operate. There have already been a number of opsec errors that have forced Firewall to recruit or otherwise "handle" argonauts that were accidentally exposed to the conspiracy's existence.

Thankfully, the argonauts' internal structure is conducive to the shared secrecy. Though not as anarchistic as Firewall or autonomist organizations, the argonauts are fairly decentralized, with internal hierarchies balanced by localized direct democracy. In practice, this means that argonaut projects and labs tend to operate fairly independently from each other. Though the argonauts foster an internal culture of transparency, peer review, and academic discourse, it is relatively easy for argonauts to conceal their off-the-books research and projects from each other. What this means is that the sentinels and proxies within the argonauts tend to be clustered together in the same labs and working groups, where they can support each others' endeavors and watch out for each other.

EXPLOITING EACH OTHER

The line between a stable and dysfunctional alliance can boil down to the distinction between working together and taking advantage of each other. There is no doubt that Firewall shamelessly uses and abuses argonaut scientific capabilities and resources, but it doesn't end there. The argonauts also enjoy close ties to research, education, and advocacy groups across the solar system, from the hypercorps and ultimates to autonomist syndicates and even the Jovians. Firewall exploits these links as well, using their argonaut connections as fronts to field research queries, scrounge for data, and leverage RNA rep network favors. We've even used this vector to insert our own agents—whether actual argonauts or sentinels posing as such—inside other groups' facilities and projects as consultants, collaborators, and envoys. Given the possibility for such infiltrations to backfire and expose the argonauts to scrutiny or backlash, these options are ill-regarded by our argonaut Firewall members.

The relations between the argonauts and Firewall are not always so one-sided, of course. The argonauts involved with Firewall also manipulate the conspiracy towards their own ends. Given the sometimes dangerous nature of scientific research, even when pursued responsibly, there have been a handful of "incidents" where things have gone awry. In many of these scenarios, Firewall has been called in to clean up the mess and contain the situation before it gets out of hand. While some of these affairs have specifically involved projects sponsored by or of interest to Firewall, and thus there was a joint investment in maintaining secrecy, others had nothing to do with Firewall, but keeping the danger under wraps helps to preserve the argonauts' public image.

Of direct relation to several of these incidents is what some proxies refer to as the argonauts' "exhuman" problem. It's an unfortunate fact that more than a few argonauts have been carried away by their egos or intellects, or simply gotten too absorbed in their lines of inquiry. Even with the argonauts' internal culture of scientific responsibility, there have been those who have crossed boundaries into dangerous or unethical territory. A few of these have been outed and absconded with their work to fringe areas; some are known to collaborate with exhuman groups. Firewall has been sicced on their trail, just as it has been brought in to sanction those who did not get away. Having access to the skills and capabilities of Firewall agents has allowed the argonauts to save face in these matters, at least publicly, but it also means that Firewall is continuously nosing around in argonaut internal affairs, hoping to sniff out any exhumans or singularity seekers that have not yet revealed their true nature.

There is one other often-overlooked manner in which the argonauts maintain quid-pro-quo with Firewall. Given their quest to liberate scientific data from walled gardens and proprietary restraints, there is an open policy in many Firewall servers, particularly those with argonaut links, to pass along any data they acquire as part of other Firewall operations. Some even go out of their way to liberate research and archives just for this purpose, as a payoff of sorts for the argonauts' continued assistance in various scientific matters. The argonauts in turn release this knowledge publicly, and if pressed on the matter simply state that it was passed to them by "anonymous sources." More than a few hypercorp project leads have seen their groundbreaking efforts exposed for all to enjoy before they could fully capitalize on it.

UNLIKELY ALLIANCES

Anyone keeping tabs on argonaut internal matters is aware that the the influence of the preservationist/traditionalist faction has been forcing more technoprogressive elements to act with restraint, with the stated aim of strengthening the organization's precautionary stance. The conservative elements within Firewall have certainly taken notice of this state of affairs and seem to be maneuvering to take full advantage of it. The conservatives would like nothing better than to wield the argonauts as a political hammer against ongoing pragmatist-established policies within Firewall. To this end, they have been recruiting more preservationist argonauts to the Firewall cause and working within the argonauts to strengthen the traditionalist position. ■

GRUE

Group Research into Unbounded Eschatologies—GRUE for short—is a persistent virtual world on the mesh, accessible only by invitation from an existing argonaut member. At first glance, it appears to be a hackneyed Olde Worlde fantasy vidgame, with cartoonish graphics and predictable tropes. But after brief exploration, the new user can see its true purpose: a forum for airing and vetting wild theories, half-assed guesses, rank speculations, and serious musings about what might happen in the real post-Fall universe … and more specifically, what might go horribly wrong. Assuming anonymous avatars, members take turns running a game session, which might last hours or days (depending on the frequency of interactions); users compete to concoct the most outlandish, entertaining, and bizarre scenarios for the downfall of the kingdom, then act as referee as the other users play characters attempting to deal with the mess. All of the elements of the kingdom have (more or less) obvious ties to the power groups of the current solar system, and usually something mocking or embarrassing layered on as well. One of the founders of GRUE claims to have been inspired by the Red Cell project of the early 21st-century United States, in which the government (in the wake of unprecedented terrorist strikes that caught authorities flat-footed) hired Hollywood screenwriters, spy-thriller novelists, hackers, and other interesting characters to dream up the most improbable ways that America could be attacked. However, another old-timer claims that GRUE evolved from a retro gaming circle of argonauts, who sought a light-hearted break from their life-or-death concerns. Over time, a seat at the virtual table became a mark of status, and the silly games became a sincere method of grappling with the often overwhelming problems of the post-Fall cosmos. ■

RESEARCH OF INTEREST

It goes without saying that the argonauts pursue much research of interest to Firewall. Outside of studies that intersect Firewall's own clandestine projects, there are a few initiatives that deserve special notice. The argonauts continue to sponsor and directly operate a number of open-source resources critical to several areas of technology with x-risk potential, including the OpenAI, OpenCog, FreeBio, and AllThing (open nano) projects, as well as the Kisilev Open Source Uplift Genetic Library on Ceres. They also maintain the Exoplanet Directory and Gate Address Library, continue the SETI program, and regularly update the Threat Reduction Filters that almost all habitats and networks use to keep out digital infections. On top of this, they have their hands in research across the scientific spectrum, from xenolinguistics and astrobiology to neogenetics and theoretical physics.

TRACKING GIANTS

Transcript of Intercepted Jabber Communication, Parties Unknown

- If we're serious about finding where these so-called [REDACTED] are that Firewall has squirreled away, wouldn't it make sense to take a hard look at the argonauts? Everything we've uncovered so far implicates them as involved, and makes it likely that they're the ones actually providing the hardware and resources.
- Yeah, but let's face it, pinpointing what the argonauts are doing with their computer resources isn't easy. They have a lot of ongoing research projects that legitimately require serious processing power, whether they're running predictive algorithms, crunching massive data sets, or factoring cryptographic hashes. On top of this, they back and help run a huge range of public network services that facilitate immense amounts of traffic. They provide some of the backbone for the Solarchive and RNA repnet, run dozens of VPNs and anonymity-providing servers, and oversee a system-wide network of anonymizing onion routers. That's a whole lot of infrastructure and traffic to hide behind, and it's scattered all across the system.
- True, but there are factors to consider that weigh in our favor. Even at the scale of resources we are talking, an ASI is going to make a noticeable blip. I feel that if we dedicate enough time and our own resources to the task, we'll pick up on some interesting patterns.
- Maybe. It's an assumption to think that a group that takes responsibility as seriously as the argonauts would let an ASI, even a friendly one, operate so closely to major centers of transhuman habitation—which is where we're going to find most of these nodes.
- It's also a major risk to the ASI itself—a stronger likelihood it will be exposed to certain unwelcome digital contagions …
- Yes, it makes more sense for them to squirrel it away somewhere out of sight, but that creates operational issues with light-speed delay and curtails their usefulness.
- Couldn't they circumvent that by fielding downgraded forks into closer environs, where they can respond more easily? Sure, they lose some capability, but it's probably a worthwhile trade-off.
- Perhaps. Let's not forget that we're talking about minds that can think circles around us. They may have means and contingencies that we would never dream of. ♣

THE INSTITUTE FOR THE STUDY OF EMERGENT TRENDS (ISET)

The blandly named ISET is the closest thing the argonauts have to a proper clandestine service. Argonauts being argonauts, this project is much less about field agents and much more about signals, collective, and open source intelligence. As far as most argonauts know, including the Senate, ISET primarily serves an information-gathering function to better coordinate important projects, archive and collate data of interest to numerous ongoing research initiatives, and forecast developments of interest. While this is indeed true, ISET also closely monitors internal argonaut matters and is not above tweaking consensus from time to time, to better align with their mission of maintaining internal security and watching over argonaut missions in the field.

It should come as no surprise that ISET is heavily involved with Firewall. Almost everyone in ISET's upper ranks or involved in clandestine ops is aware of Firewall's existence, and many serve double duty as sentinels or proxies.

ISET is led by Thales Alhazen, an uplifted African Gray who is rumored to have been the pinnacle achievement of Somatek's most ambitious attempts to redesign neo-avians. As ISET's project lead, Alhazen is the unofficial spymaster for the argonauts. ISET's main base of operations, Atalanta, is a tightly guarded secret and access is restricted to a select few. Atalanta is staffed entirely by argonauts who are also involved with Firewall as a matter of security.

One of ISET's secret but prime directives is to oversee and protect argonaut interests. To this end, they serve a counterintelligence function against rival groups that seek to poach argonaut research and data. On top of vetting individual argonauts and providing remote overwatch on the security of various argonaut labs and habitats, ISET works hard to identify groups that might be targeting the argonauts in order to derail their plans. Alhazen seems convinced that several major argonaut research initiatives have been infiltrated by both Oversight and Titanian intelligence assets and takes the job of rooting out and isolating these security breaches very seriously. ISET also takes a more active role in providing operational security, handled via the secretive Medeans.

APOLLO PROJECT

Apollo is ISET's premier endeavor. Its stated goal is to gather massive amounts of data, to which it applies heavyweight pattern-recognition algorithms, all for the purpose of predicting future outcomes. A team of mathematicians, programmers, and foresight experts—many of them AGIs—maintain the project, assisted by some powerful non-sapient expert systems. Or at least that's what Firewall knows about the project—they keep the whole affair tightly wrapped up and tucked away out on Markov, their secret beehive in the

Kuiper Belt. While a lot of their foresight mechanisms are geared towards anticipating the future development of transhumanity, both near- and long-term, they also focus their attention towards an array of specialized fields. They can predict the weather on Mars, sunspot activity for dozens of stars, variations in the Planetary Stock Exchange, g-rep network fluctuations, spaceflights within the Saturnian system, velocity of new nanoware developments, and much more, all with startling accuracy. Where useful, this data is applied to ongoing argonaut projects and sold or exchanged with outside entities. A subset of the Apollo Project's predictions are oriented specifically towards x-threats and shared with Firewall scanners.

It is worth noting that the Apollo Project believes itself to be in a sort of "oracle arms race" with similar foresight/predictions initiatives, particularly Stellar Intelligence, and to a lesser extent, Oversight. It is likely that these other predictive initiatives are more localized to the inner system/Consortium and focused on probability mapping for individuals, groups, and factions considered threats, whereas the Apollo Project is more of a big-picture affair. Nevertheless, evidence indicates that both Stellar and Oversight have made efforts to breach the Apollo Project's security and have also gone to great lengths to plant false/misleading data. The argonauts have faced similar issues with hacker groups such as Datacide and the Decepticons. Even more interesting, an unknown group known as the Sybils has in several cases out-predicted Apollo's theories, making some of us wonder where this group get its resources.

Project Peacock

Another one of ISET's major undertakings, Project Peacock (so named due to the many "eyes" on peacock feathers) is perhaps the most comprehensive signals-intelligence operation in the solar system. Focused primarily around the Long Array on Saturn's moon Dione (in conjunction with the Titanians), this initiative pursues SETI (searching the sky for signals from extraterrestrial intelligences), emergency/distress response, and, of course, communications intercepts and spying.

What the argonauts don't advertise is that the Long Array is just their most prominent operation; they have dozens of other intercept stations and hundreds of satellites laced throughout the system. According to what ISET tells the Senate, the data accumulated from this signals-intelligence work is applied to research projects as varied as measuring the influence of solar weather on system comms or establishing the signals footprint transhumanity is leaving for any ETIs that might be watching from afar. More importantly, ISET uses its vantage point to keep its fingers on the pulse of the solar system, feeding intercepted data directly to their forecasting expert systems on Markov and anticipating shifts in the political climate, potential threats, and more. Much of this data—but not all—is also passed directly to Firewall scanners.

The Medeans

The Medeans are the argonauts' secret paramilitary force. Small in size but well-equipped and well-trained, Medean operatives almost always act in a clandestine capacity. The bulk of the argonaut membership is unaware of their existence, believing occasional rumors about them to be myths. In the few instances in which they have been brought into the spotlight, they have been explained away as mercenary assets. While tasked with bodyguarding major argonaut figureheads (forknapping by hypercorps is an ongoing issue), they are primarily deployed as field agents to oversee security on argonaut missions. They also infiltrate hostile organizations, root out exhuman and singularity seeker threats internal to the argonauts, and retrieve argonaut assets that go missing—particularly TITAN and alien relics. Medeans and Firewall sentinels are sometimes tasked to work together on joint projects.

The Medeans are led by Esther Ren, a former Australian spy turned military consultant. Though involved with Firewall early on, she opted instead to lead the Medeans and focus on argonaut affairs. While she could easily tip the delicate balance of power by becoming involved in the argonauts' internal politics, she deftly steers the Medeans free of any political favoritism.

Hypercorp Interests

Posted by:

Cacophonous, Firewall Router <Info Msg Rep>

Hypercorps are infamous for their "rational self-interest," which is another way of saying they're egotistical jerks that don't care about others. As a result, they're not the usual ones we think of first when considering other parties that might be working to stop x-risks. Some of them actually take the wider picture into consideration, however: it's hard to sell your product when your customer base is extinct. Even then, however, only a few find it worthwhile to throw significant resources at the matter. Others are more directly linked to the issues at hand due to their own activities and wisely keep an eye on x-threats that might create problems.

Needless to say, Firewall is rarely considered a legitimate operation in hypercorp eyes. Cover stories are a must when engaging with them; if not, you need to convince them that Firewall is too important of an asset to lose.

Cognite

It may seem odd to include Cognite in this discussion, as they're not generally on the radar as an entity that has any direct agents working against x-threats. Most of our people correctly assume that they pay their dues to Oversight—possibly Ozma as well—and sit tight with the other hypercorps. The truth is that after everything went to hell with the Futura project

and the Consortium and Oversight came down on their asses, Cognite started up and maintains a small internal team to clean up after their own messes. With all the psychosurgery, mental augmentation, exotech, and even TITAN-derived research that Cognite has had its fingers in, their Internal Process Review (IPR) team have had their hands more than full from day one.

IPR has three mandates and lacks the resources to succeed at any of them. The first goal is to track down and recollect wayward survivors of the Futura project and escaped or misplaced uplifts. These activities only matter to us because there are a fair few Lost and liberated uplifts that have worked with Firewall, and we have to keep them safe. There's no telling what damage could be done to our organization if Cognite were to play around in the minds of any of our operatives. Occasionally, asyncs that came from the Lost are deeply tangled up in exsurgent outbreaks or singularity cults, and in those cases we have some grounds for mutual cause with IPR and may be able to use their efforts to our benefit.

The second mandate is to safeguard the use of Cognite's products and techniques by the general public so there's no backlash against their field of work. Seeing that Cognite has dedicated itself to overclocking the transhuman mind, producing a toybox of products loved by singularity seekers everywhere, playing god by raising other species to sapience, and being the foremost provider of personality-editing and VR-conditioning services, there's an almost infinite number of problems for them to deal with. The most IPR manages to do on this front is some witness tampering, which involves kidnapping and memory edits. On rare occasions they send assets into the field to infiltrate or dismantle nascent exhuman or singularity seeker groups. In this capacity, we have crossed paths several times.

Lastly, they're expected to put out fires when Cognite experiments go horribly wrong before Oversight or the public get wind of them. As we know from our own operations, Cognite has never been shy about crossing ethical boundaries in their labs. It's safe to say that IPR is under-equipped to check in on dozens of different complex psychosurgical and nanotech projects being performed digitally and in person at lab spaces spread across dozens of different habitats.

IPR Operations

There are only about a dozen people working in IPR. Rather than getting together a larger team, they follow the Cognite mandate of replicating experience and presence through short-term forking and multitasking-enabling mental manipulations. The over-reliance on a few personnel actually magnifies the operating problems caused by their inexperience with any type of tradecraft, since you have multiple instances of the same person who lacks the same skills not knowing what they're doing at the same time—truly a marvel of corporate efficiency. Sarcasm aside, the people stuck in IPR have to rely too much on their own and Cognite's strengths, so they have a pretty slim playbook to work from, but it can still be effective.

Searching for people—whether it's Lost, uplifts, or anyone else they're interested in—starts with psychographic modeling and behavior analysis. IPR feeds as much known info about the target as they can get into one of Cognite's corporate VR sims or dream factories to game out different lines of pursuit-and-capture scenarios. They choose whatever they model as the best, or the two or three if there's a close performance, and hire out established ego hunters: the IPR folks do it all from their desk. Although this type of approach seems easy to escape, it's actually difficult to shake off. Cognite's psychographic capabilities are top-notch and a typical ego hunter is going to be hard to shake when they have a lead. For anyone who's a Firewall agent, the best plan is to lay low for quite a long time, unless a new identity can be drummed up.

In-person operations for IPR are infrequent, but when they have to shut down a singularity cult using their tech to build a hive mind or clean out a lab that's been overrun with an infectious meme, they need to get their hands dirty so others don't find out and word never makes it back to Oversight. Combat operations are a weak point for IPR, so they tend to rely on drones and bots or sleeve lots of forks to try for an advantage in numbers. They'll run skillsofts to shore up weaknesses in their own talents and use any possible circumstantial advantage they can give themselves. Using mesh attack vectors is common: favorites include manipulating hab systems to shut off power and life support, hacking and suborning security measures, and disabling target networks. Their e-warfare is a strong suit, so make sure to watch your own mesh security carefully if you run into them.

Contact Protocols

I almost feel sorry for them, but their bad situation is our opportunity. IPR is overworked, understaffed, and in over their heads, which makes them a ripe target for infiltration or co-optation. In short, we should be friendly and try to build a sympathetic relationship with IPR as an organization whenever we encounter them in an anti-singularity seeker or -exsurgent scenario. If we encounter them doing clean-up for Cognite to avoid Oversight, we can help there as well, as long as we can keep an eye on what Cognite is up to.

It's not without risk, but I believe a concerted effort to actually help out IPR and see if we can establish influence in their organization has great potential. Their lack of tradecraft expertise leaves IPR agents vulnerable to humint and subversion operations. Given the stress and poor working conditions, there's a good chance we could convert one or more of them to act as a double-agent or just defect outright to Firewall. Even one contact like that could provide

Start Æther Jabber
Active Members: 2

- While we're talking SI, I ran across a little tidbit related to Rook. I heard you might be working the profile.
- I might know who is. What did you find?
- You'll understand that I can't give you much in the way of hard data—got to protect my assets and portfolio too—but if you can keep this between us, I can give you something to look into.
- Really? You're going to give me the disclaimer every time?
- You know I'm discreet. What do you have?
- SI doesn't generally let clients know, but they've managed to keep a few operating satellites that are running in Earth orbit that they co-opted from some former governments. They move geo-data to reclaimers to fund the black-budget work they don't want Oversight to know about.
- They keep an eye on the satellites from a little tin can in higher orbit. About two weeks ago, there was a private transit shuttle that launched from Shackle booked for Vo Nguyen, but it made a detour stop to the SI hab and offloaded goods, swapped the shuttle crew for the folks from the tin can, and then went to Vo Nguyen.
- What makes you think Rook had anything to do with it? Those could easily be SI personnel.
- What makes it interesting is the pic of the cargo unloaded. I think you'll agree it's unusual.

  <encrypted file received>
- It certainly appears to validate the association.
- After that little exchange, the transmissions from the hab back to SI's offices on Luna stopped, and it started transmitting data to the satellites in Earth orbit instead. SI has never sent data to those birds in all the time we've been watching.
- We'll definitely be in touch. This is problematic.

extremely valuable information on Cognite's research projects and uplift programs, or even access to their dream factories. The hypercorp's expertise in psychosurgery and cognitive mapping, however, makes it a challenge to turn their agents.

The holy grail of possible intel from Cognite would be access to their work on hive minds and distributed consciousness in biological morphs. Research in those areas skates dangerously close, if not crossing over, into exhuman or even TITAN tech territory, and we know that's the dream Cognite is chasing. Firewall's argonaut contacts are keenly interested in this area, and any information we could get would be prized.

STELLAR INTELLIGENCE

It's common knowledge that Stellar Intelligence is the de-facto spy agency for the Planetary Consortium as a whole, and at times a major opponent for Firewall, but they're both less and more than that. Though StellInt depends on business within the Consortium for the majority of its funding, it does not officially represent their power or interests—they're contractors, so they lack the power and authority of designated Consortium agencies like Oversight. However, that official separation allows them to pursue deniable operations and activity throughout the system for anyone willing to pay their rates. The additional freedom to act anywhere and the fact that Stellar is ultimately self-governing gives them flexibility, and in the intelligence field that equals power. Consortium oligarchs are smart enough to realize this, which is why Oversight pays such close attention to Stellar Intelligence's activities, and why the bigger players in the Consortium keep such a tight leash on StellInt's stakeholder status in the venture.

The situation with Stellar Intelligence gets much more complicated when it comes to dealing with x-risks. The Consortium obviously recognizes TITAN remnants and exsurgent activity as a threat, and Stellar is an integral part of keeping watch for fringe groups of singularity seekers and exhumans that might cause problems in those areas. When problems are identified, the details are passed on to planetary or habitat governments, or the Consortium brings in mercenaries to deal with them directly. Firewall's concern with that arrangement is that Stellar Intelligence is the organization reviewing and deciding what constitutes a threat and when, if at all, that information is passed on to other groups for resolution. What happens when SI finds out another hypercorp is behind the problem? There's plenty of incentive not to rock the boat in the internal politics of the Consortium, and plenty of opportunity for Stellar Intelligence to engage in blackmail, extortion, or collaboration with other hypercorps if they catch them dealing with TITAN, exsurgent, or xenotech contraband.

In Firewall's dealings in the past decade, we've found dozens of instances of the corps playing with fire, but there hasn't been a single instance of Stellar Intelligence publicly outing another big player in the Consortium for doing so. Who knows what else they've found or done in their work for their private contracts? We certainly don't, and that's a problem. All the information Stellar Intelligence accumulates flows into the organization for their own internal analysis and use, but they only share select bits and pieces with their clients. We don't know what they know, suspect, and want to accomplish with their information.

Stellar Intelligence is also a significant organizational opponent to Firewall. I'll get to the discussion of interactions on an agent-to-agent level below, but SI as an entity and Firewall as an entity are on different sides of the fight. Stellar Intelligence has been engaged in constant discovery and compromise attempts against Firewall for years, and they're the group feeding information to the Consortium public

relations machine, pushing the meme that Firewall is an anarchist, anti-Consortium terrorist organization. SI intel is used to supplement and expand on the most-wanted lists for the entire Consortium, as well as the reference and assessment files that go along with them. We've suffered attrition from the information Stellar Intelligence puts together on us and our activities for years.

Operations

Since I seem to be in the habit of stating unpopular truths, I'll get this one out up front: any given Stellar Intelligence agent is probably better at tradecraft than any given Firewall operative, and we need to remind ourselves of that truth. SI is primarily made up of spooks and analysts that were in the intelligence field before the Fall, gathered up from the remnants of their former states. From its inception, Stellar has had access to a wide assortment of assets, and they used the early years after the Fall to bring together top talent from across the system. For all the strengths that Firewall's ad-hoc communitarian structure brings us, consistent training and standards isn't one of them, and we would be well-served to learn from dedicated professionals.

Stellar Intelligence is first-and-foremost focused on intel gathering: they have established a widespread net of cultivated assets for humint and have what is likely the largest and most sophisticated private surveillance network for gathering elint. As a result of their heritage with traditional spying, their agents often pursue soft gathering of information through their humint assets as their primary approach. The rationale for this is: getting information willingly makes the informant complicit, and so more likely to be of use as a possible asset again. Also, people are subjective and can be manipulated through many different means; there are more ways to keep an informant quiet than there are to cover up a brute-force database hack.

These are old-school spooks that can get the job done without all the latest and greatest toys, and that makes them even more effective when they do use the full suite of options. If soft intelligence gathering doesn't work and they aren't on an entirely covert project, Stellar agents can use their corp's pull to gain access to the local security and habitat surveillance systems of most Consortium polities. This is common for general stakeouts and long-term observation of targets when they're building profiles and reference data, and it can be used to help identify possible assets for humint work or to supplement and verify humint data. For our purposes, as long as our operatives are keeping up good data sanitation and a solid cover of daily activity, they should be all right.

When this approach won't work—because it isn't available outsystem, isn't reliable in some of the older or more densely packed habitats, or may blow a Stellar agent's cover—they resort to old-fashioned physical compromise. Agents that engage in their own direct surveillance can be expected to have access to the best nano-scale and electronic intrusion and observation tech available, up to and including unique designs that are proprietary and not in use outside of SI. Infiltration attempts aren't limited to device tech alone, as our information indicates the use of mimics, swarmanoids, and even more exotic morphs in some operations. When they can't compromise someone to give them what they want or a sophisticated hack isn't viable, they aren't above break-ins and physical theft.

Unlike the other groups we've discussed, Stellar will rarely engage in blatant combat operations, usually only as a defensive measure for an agent to extricate themselves. Given the close relationship between Stellar Intelligence and Consortium governments and organizations, they can usually call on local security forces while in-system, but they're also cautious enough to have freelance support contracts available for backup when they're working further rimward. If things go horribly wrong, emergency farcasters or dead switches are de rigeur for their agents in the field, so it's almost impossible to take them alive for questioning.

Contact Protocols

Although Stellar Intelligence as a group actively opposes Firewall, contact in the field isn't always hostile. Their agents are primarily focused on building asset networks and humint; they're professionals, and most of them would rather have a few connections that even the higher-ups at SI don't know about if it helps them out, even if it goes against the official company line. Being the ad-hoc organization that we are, I'm sure that many of our sentinels feel the same way. Stellar Intelligence's focus on in-person field ops leaves their agents with a very long leash—just like our own—and that means we have to be able to carefully assess each one on their own merits. As long as our people realize the tightrope they're walking and don't get lazy with their own security, it's a tacit situation that benefits both organizations. My protocol concern is mainly at the proxy level: our handlers need to be keeping an eye on the bigger picture and make sure their assets aren't getting too friendly with SI personnel, and also that Firewall operations don't stir up too much notice in areas on which Stellar is also working. When we're too noisy in what they consider their turf, their handlers start upping the pressure to start bringing us in, and so the cycle continues.

Until and unless Stellar Intelligence becomes more active in engaging with specific x-threat vectors, we should continue the current policy: we keep a watchful eye on fraternization at low levels and keep up the cold war and compromise attempts at high levels.

Other Corps

There are many other hypercorps that, as a matter of course, deal with situations or technologies with

x-risk potential. Only a few of these have developed their own internal departments for monitoring, assessing, and combating such threats. Preparations of that sort require considerable effort and capital, and it is usually an expense not deemed worthwhile when such work can be outsourced to another corp better suited to the task. Those that do tackle x-risks themselves usually rely on a small group of experts that are specialized to the specific dangers the hypercorp faces. While these personnel are often quite knowledgeable, they typically lack the resources to throw at a problem—something Firewall can take advantage of.

Direct Action

This infamous mercenary outfit has one thing going for it: a cadre of soldiers experienced in fighting exsurgents and TITAN machines. Most of this experience derives from the Fall, making it slightly dated, but DA troops have had a few notable run-ins with outbreaks and reactivated machines, not to mention the occasional exhuman cell in the fringe or swarm of alien critters on a gate op.

Experia

With their hands involved in all things media, it should be no surprise that Experia has a department of personnel that specialize in dealing with basilisk hacks, memetic warfare, and similar mind-hacking vectors. While Experia is mostly interested in filtering out and defending against such exploits, there is no denying that they have pursued some research into this territory themselves. It is likely that any outbreaks they encounter will also be viewed as a learning opportunity.

Gatekeeper, Go-nin, Pathfinder, and Terragenesis

As defenders and exploiters of the precious Pandora gates, these corporations by necessity have legions of specialists qualified to identify threats of all varieties and contain them. Their priority is ensuring that nothing passes into the solar system from an exoplanet vector; they are somewhat more lax about threats going the other way. Most of them also retain personnel skilled in classifying and handling various xenofauna, extrasolar environment, and even astronomical dangers. They also, of course, know more about gate operations than almost anyone else. If an alien or TITAN threat were to manifest through the gates, their expertise would be invaluable.

Go-nin, however, has a claim the others do not. Due to their troubles with the Discord Gate, they have devoted considerable resources towards analyzing the exhuman threat. From what we understand, Go-nin corporate security has been mapping exhuman assets through the solar system and beyond the gates. They do not seem content to rely on their ultimate mercenaries to deter the threat and have even undertaken some of their own sabotage and extermination ops against exhuman targets. From what we understand, their efforts to insert their own counterintelligence operatives into exhuman groups have gone poorly, with most of their agents either identified and killed (and sometimes eaten) outright or going "native" and taking up the exhuman cause.

Gunboat

Gunboat is a private security/military contractor that made their name as (self-appointed, as far as we can tell) experts at detecting and eliminating TITAN threats on newly discovered exoplanets. If their members hadn't uploaded several XPs of fights against TITAN machines to the mesh, we'd happily classify Gunboat as a marketing ploy and move on. They may still be, but from what we can tell, they're a legitimate military outfit, and are worth additional investigation. Just keep in mind that any XP they produce or mesh stories about their exploits are as likely to be publicity stunts as they are legitimate combat experiences.

Gunboat falls under the command of one Gena Lebarrie, an ex-mercenary with a spotless record of service dating back to before the Fall. She was briefly involved in Direct Action early on, before setting off to start her own business. Direct Action was an early investor, but they were bought out a few years in by an unknown party. There's an unverified rumor floating around that she was somehow involved with the creation of the TITANs, but any records from that time period either no longer exist or are locked away. Lebarrie also happens to be Gunboat's public relations expert, spokesperson, and the main source for their XPs. Despite her ranks in badassitude, she's affable and easy to please.

Kali NetSec

This hypercorp is small but elite. It counts among its employees some of the best white-hat hackers in the inner system. Many of them are veterans from the digital front lines against the TITANs during the Fall. They are skilled at finding, countering, and eliminating digital exsurgent infections. In fact, the company takes a sort of pride in continuing to track down the virus a decade after the Fall, before new outbreaks can occur. This is tempered, of course, by a grim exasperation that the virus and other TITAN weapons continue to exist, evolve, and even thrive in various corners of the mesh.

Kali's mission to eliminate the virus isn't all benevolent. We know their white hats have used several 0-day exploits that were quite likely reverse engineered from TITAN code, and they are also in the business of selling 0-days on the open market. Some of our own programmers have concerns about their use of TITAN code fragments, though the bits we've acquired and analyzed show that they've stripped it clean of anything dangerous. Of further concern, however, is that Kali may have seized the command-and-control servers for some still functioning TITAN botnets.

Lucky Star Group

As one of the system's premier providers of mesh network hardware, Lucky Star's engineers have become experts in the attacks used by the TITANs to subvert our machines during the Fall. Their Quality Control department takes a keen interest in acquiring and analyzing new threats that are deployed in the wild, so as to harden the next generation of systems. They have an open bounty available to anyone that submits new hardware or firmware exploits.

Nanosys

Given their seat on the Hypercorp Council and their top ranking in the field of nanotechnology, Nanosys is the go-to whenever the Consortium has an issue concerning dangerous nanotech; even Oversight defers to them. A consortium in their own right, they pull upon the expertise of nano-engineers from dozens of hypercorps. They've efficiently handled numerous incidents with TITAN nanoswarms and other rogue nanotech and reputedly established contingency plans and countermeasures for various nano-threat scenarios. In a few instances, they've even been deputized to help Oversight monitor and dismantle criminal groups and hypercorps that were playing with restricted nano.

Jovian Agencies

Posted by: Tio Silencio,
Firewall Router, Jovian Republic <Info Msg Rep>

Two types of people get access to high-level state secrets: those ambitious enough to have seated themselves in the halls of power and those so diligent that the powerful deem them indispensable. The diligent—from whose ranks traitors come—are usually well cared for by their masters. When they betray them, then, their motives are invariably complex. Personal gain may be a factor, but it's never the deciding one. No, treason boils down to the traitor's belief that everyone around them—their colleagues, their family, their whole country—is *wrong*—so wrong, be it about a rival nation, a threat from nature, or a menace like the TITANs—that the only answer is to act alone.

That's my story, in any case.

The Republic, when it's aware of Firewall at all, misunderstands the Eye as a terrorist group working toward an agenda defined by the argonauts and their left-wing allies. This attitude can be very difficult to understand for those outside the Jovian intel community. Firewall might be secretive, but the argonauts are by and large very public about their goals. And those goals—x-threat evaluation, lifeboat strategies, and the like—are largely non-controversial, even in the hypercorp sphere.

If you've lived in the spook world, you understand its pathologies, chiefest of which is paranoia. The Jovian Security Council opposes the argonaut platform for transhuman survival as an ideological threat to the Republic's own survival strategy. Once Jovian intel analysts drew enough lines between the argonauts and the Eye, then, all dealings with Firewall were shaped by the Security Council's contra-argonauts worldview. At other times, elements of Firewall have been confused with native Jovian extremist movements, such as the anarchist JAC.

It wasn't the stance of JSF Intelligence on Firewall, though, that lead me to treason. It was their stance on other polities—one of aggression thinly veiled in détente. Closely linked to this is their strategy in case of another TITAN attack.

The Jovian Republic, you see, is a massive x-risk for the rest of transhumanity. You will find Jovian Firewall agents a strange breed, with complex motives. But on this, most of us agree.

The Security Council's operational plan for resumed hostilities with the TITANs treats all other transhuman habitats, EM-spectrum transmissions, and space traffic as potential infection vectors. Neighboring habs are to be seized or destroyed. Planetary system-scale EM jamming would be set up to cook incoming transmissions—incidentally creating a comm hole through a swath of transhuman space. And any incoming ship traffic from other polities would be destroyed without warning.

It's a sensible policy.

It's also insane.

Jupiter is the middle solar system's trebuchet. A high percentage of traffic between inner and outer systems uses its mass for a gravity assist. The Republic's scorched space contingency plans would isolate inner and outer systems from any hope of coordinating a unified defense.

For this and other reasons, we Jovian proxies and sentinels find common cause with Firewall. May history bear out our choice.

Jovian Intelligence Services

The Jovian intelligence community comprises the following agencies:

- **Security Council Intelligence (SCI)** is the Republic's principal intelligence agency and also its internal security force. It's headed personally by Intelligence Commander Zane McFarlane of the Security Council.
- **Jovian Space Force Intelligence (JSFI)** is the Republic's military intelligence agency as well as its foreign intelligence agency.
- **CBEAT Office of Investigations** investigates suspected abuses of technology.
- **Civil Defense Corps Bureau of Investigation (CDBI)** is charged with domestic counterintelligence and counterterrorism.
- **Senate Accounting Office (SAO)** investigates cases of government waste and malfeasance.

Of these agencies, JSFI and CBEAT are the best equipped and the most likely to end up in a direct

confrontation with Firewall agents. SCI enjoys political privilege but is mostly a surveillance and internal enforcement agency. CDBI and the SAO have no awareness of Firewall but command sweeping investigative powers. The latter two are mentioned in part because sentinels who work for either are valuable assets.

X-Risk Preparedness

The Republic's preparedness for various x-threats often stems from how its intel agencies control information about them.

Exsurgents and the Exsurgent Virus

The memory that, during the Fall, humans transformed into monsters and became part of the TITANs' arsenal, and that some type of virus did this, isn't something the Jovian authorities have ever attempted to suppress. If they wanted to, it'd be impossible. Too many people saw it with their own eyes. Whereas the Consortium media downplays these facts, or disguises them behind fiction and games, the Jovians present it matter-of-factly. They want their population to remember that fear and terror.

The average Jovian citizen participates in at least one simulated exsurgent outbreak per year in order to raise awareness and keep quarantine procedure skills sharp. However, JSFI periodically makes seemingly inexplicable tweaks to quarantine procedure without explaining their purpose to the public. No one is quite sure, for example, why the new guidelines advise civilians during a condition one emergency not to stand near any curtain with a gloss coat more than 1 micrometer thick.

What the average citizen or rank-and-file officer lacks are facts about what the virus really does, how it acts, the variety of strains, or any inkling of its origins beyond being associated with the TITANs.

TITANs

As plans for another war with the TITANs go, the Security Council's are as solid as they come—minus the part about abandoning the rest of transhumanity to its fate. Counter-TITAN planning is where JSFI puts its best minds: veteran commanders from the Fall years, simulations experts, logistics wizards, researchers, and technology analysts. Occasionally CBEAT personnel are also drafted as collaborators. Their conclusions on how to prepare have been highly professional, mathematically exacting, and not a small amount paranoid.

What JSFI has planned, though, is a matter only for the Security Council, JSFI's planning groups, and a handful of highly placed officers in the Space Force and other intel services. The average Jovian, including rank-and-file military, receives only vague reassurances from state media regarding preparations and contingencies.

Beyond the plans themselves, specialized knowledge about the TITANs is closely circumscribed. In

particular, the true facts regarding the TITANs' likely genesis as a US Defense Department research project are a tightly guarded secret. Even those of us highly connected to the machinery of the intel community can find only dark rumors. Is JSFI holding on to the secrets of the TITANs' design and development—including any weaknesses? It's a vexing thought.

Average Jovians know nothing of the TITANs unless they happen to have been following the rumor mill keenly during the Fall. Conspiracy theorists and others too free with these memories get nighttime visits from SCI.

War Machines

Because destroyed spacecraft usually don't leave much to reverse engineer, the Republic initially had one major disadvantage over inner system polities in counter-TITAN planning. They had very few captured TITAN war machines for research. JSFI remedied this with several daring incursions into the Martian TQZ during the early post-Fall years, before the Consortium had fully solidified its cordon. The incursions created a diplomatic incident, but the Consortium wasn't about to start a war over the kidnapping of murderous robots.

JSFI and CBEAT have both reverse-engineered captured war machines. Aside from gleaning technology from them, the Republic's researchers have cloned the machines themselves. War machine clones, either jammed or loaded with expert systems, are pitted against JSF Marines in live-fire combat exercises. This leaves Jovian troops extremely well prepared for encounters with TITAN war bots.

Clones of war machines are also a staple in the military dramas that are a highlight of Jovian entertainment. The average Jovian citizen would recognize a headhunter, even if they had the wrong name for it.

Other X-Threats

The Republic's stance of protectionism in all things does what it says on the tin. Stray WMD, self-replicating nanoswarms, computer viruses, and the like are less of a threat to the Jovians than to any other polity. CBEAT's go-slow policies do keep dangerous things locked up in labs. CDBI's counter-terrorism unit interdicts most attempts at weapons trafficking in Jovian space. And SCI is always watching for the enemy within.

That said, Jovian analysts do recognize one major Achilles heel in their preparations: disease. The sizable population of non-genefixed humans among the Jovian citizenry means that biowarfare is Jovian COINTEL's special bogeyman.

Access to Technology

Many assume that because the Jovian populace are denied bleeding-edge technology, their security forces don't have it, either. This is a dangerous misconception. CBEAT has approved certain technologies specifically for use in the field by JSFI officers and CBEAT investigators. Aside from military-grade weapons and armor, this includes implants, nanotech, and espionage gear not available to civilians or the regular security forces. Nanohives, mesh inserts, surveillance gear, bots, bioware augmentations, life recorders, and even sometimes cortical stacks are available to elite agents.

Whether a given piece of gear or implant is issued depends on the agent's status, the mission briefing, and the risk to the mission and bystanders if a given piece were hacked or infected. In the last case, the

JOVIAN VAULTS

Being militaristic and survival-minded, it should come as no surprise that the Jovians maintain their own hidden bunkers for surviving an epic war with the TITANs, transhumanity, or some other disaster. Unlike the vaults deployed by groups like Firewall, the Jovians do not load theirs with stored egos and the means to fabricate bodies. Instead, they are filled to capacity with cryogenic capsules capable of sustaining a frozen human for hundreds of years. ■

EQUIPMENT THREAT (ET) SCALE

The ET scale is used in Jovian military and espionage jargon to describe the threat to mission personnel and bystanders from a given mission's gear and morph loadout. High-ET missions are prestigious assignments undertaken by only the most trusted, elite cadres in the JSFI and CBEAT.

LOWEST THREAT

1	Chemical firearms and flat morphs
2	Rail weapons and splicer morphs
3	Enhanced senses
4	Adrenal boost, nuclear weapons
5	Life recorders, XP recorders, neurachem
6	Mesh inserts, COT tools
7	Unrestricted cornucopia machines, any nanopharm
8	Medichines, cortical Stacks, antimatter weaponry, any pod morph
9	Any synthmorph
10	Ghostrider module, petal trip, swarmanoid, flexbot

HIGHEST THREAT

Note that threat levels for morphs are for being sleeved into them, not jamming them.

It's unknown whether ET 9 or 10 missions have ever been launched. ■

concern for "bystanders" is with Jovian citizens and civilians, not citizens of other polities. Equipment Threat (ET) is a 1 to 10 scale developed by CBEAT to characterize the risk level to personnel and bystanders from the loadout for a given deployment. ET rapidly becomes asymmetrical between teams operating in Jovian population centers versus those operating outside of them.

CDBI and SCI have very limited access to nanotech and backup technology. CDBI's Biowarfare Section has the best tech that CBEAT is willing to approve for civil defense usage, which includes limited medical nanotech. Note that AIs and AGIs are never issued, even at ET 10. Infomorphs may be referred to as ARCHINT (Archive Intelligence) sources, but they're otherwise kept in dead storage. SCI's ARCHINT group has access to ego bridges, XP rigs, and servers capable of hosting egos in simulspace. They're used for the sole purpose of processing and interrogating ego backups of interest to internal security investigations. A culture that views ego bridges in the same light as execution devices has so far kept anyone with access to them from experimenting.

Security Council Intelligence (SCI)

Reports to: Office of the Commander in Chief
Agency Head: Director Zane McFarlane, Intelligence Commander

SCI is both the head agency of the Jovian intelligence community and the Republic's internal security agency. The public believes JSFI is the lead intel agency. Secretly, however, SCI under McFarlane calls the shots. In its role as secret police force, SCI has almost unlimited powers to surveil, search, and detain Jovian citizens and civilians.

History

SCI has existed as long as the Security Council. There was an immediate need for a surveillance and informant network when the Junta was establishing control. Before the shooting even started, McFarlane had tapped the best he could get access to. SCI's work was instrumental in gauging the readiness of rival polities and identifying targets for the first strikes that set up the Republic as the sole power in circumjovian space.

While it doesn't have access to the same level of technology, nor possess the same prestige, as JSFI and CBEAT, SCI has a great deal of influence. SCI can detain and interrogate anyone below a Security Council member. Neither due process nor oversight curtail this power, and neither high-ranking military officers nor CBEAT bigwigs are immune.

This can and does lead to abuse of power and an atmosphere of chilling paranoia within the Jovian security forces, but it also acts as a much-needed check on JSFI and CBEAT. Military coups are an ever-present danger for a regime like the Republic, as is the fact that CBEAT holds so many aces technologically. SCI's mandate, which it performs with brutal efficiency, is to make certain that no one, no matter how high their rank or classified their work, challenges the Security Council.

Organization

The Director of SCI, Zane McFarlane, also has overall command of all Jovian intelligence agencies in his role as Intelligence Commander of the Security Council.

Subordinate agencies have wide leeway as to how they perform their functions, but they take their marching orders from McFarlane. As such, SCI's top level analysts—the people with whom McFarlane surrounds himself—are also the immediate consumers of intelligence produced by the other agencies. On one hand, this makes SCI a bottleneck for intelligence making its way from security agencies to government. It also means that the interpretation of intelligence data is subject to the bias of SCI's tight-knit circle of senior analysts. On the other hand, McFarlane and his inner circle are anything but stupid, and the system helps control inter-agency turf wars. When it comes to making big picture assessments of intel data from disparate sources, McFarlane has cut all the fat out of the process.

SCI is a civilian agency, so agents don't have military rank unless temporarily assigned it for an operation. The exception is McFarlane, who is deemed equivalent to a general because he sits on the Security Council. SCI is organized into the following offices:

- **Archival Intelligence (ARCHINT).** ARCHINT is the Republic's term for HUMINT gathered from backed-up egos. Cleared to use resleeving and simulspace technology—in particular on non-Jovians—this office debriefs, reports on, and archives ego backups, forks, and infomorphs that fall into SCI's hands.
- **Central Security Directorate.** This office includes McFarlane and his top analysts. Its role is to act as a clearinghouse for all intelligence data produced by other agencies. It interprets, prioritizes, and reports to the Security Council. CSD sets the agenda for all other Jovian security agencies based on its assessment of their intelligence product vis-a-vis the big strategic picture.
- **Internal Security.** Black-clad paramilitary thugs straight out of Gilliam, complete with 4 am raids and dentist chairs. Not usually an issue for Firewall teams. If you attract their notice, you've already blown your mission in numerous other ways.
- **Office of the Censor General.** The name of this office is something of a misnomer, as the Republic no longer has a single person in the post of Censor General. The name is functionally accurate, though. The Republic's censors don't have a particularly deft touch. They're the equivalent to other polities' memetic warfare specialists, but they lack both theoretical and practical grounding in the memetic warfare discipline. Largely this is because the practice of memetic warfare outside the Republic

relies heavily on AIs, AGIs, and augmented transhuman minds to enhance pattern recognition and rapidly model the noösphere in search of ideas on the move. The result are blunt-edged information blackouts so abrupt and sweeping as to be darkly comical.

PEOPLE

Zane McFarlane is Intelligence Commander of the Jovian Republic and Director of SCI. DCI McFarlane's tenure has seen the ravaging of Earth, the birth of the Republic, and the subsequent decade of consolidation following the Fall. Like many of his peers on the Council, McFarlane deems himself more responsible to history than to individuals—and it shows in everything SCI does.

Colombina Acres is Deputy Director of ARCHINT, as well as its most talented memory trawler. Firewall would like a word with her, but given that she works out of the Castle, she's incredibly difficult to reach. Acres is known to have acquired and examined half a dozen cortical stacks cut from an Ozma team that got too close to a Jovian secret project in the Belt. Her report never got wide circulation; someone high up in SCI decided it belonged on a very exclusive distribution list. But Acres is still out there, waiting to be pumped for information by sentinels clever enough to shanghai an executive researcher on her day off from the Castle without bringing the entire Jovian security apparatus down on themselves.

THE CASTLE (GANYMEDE ORBIT)

The Castle is the operational heart of the Jovian intel community. In Ganymede orbit, its mission is to serve as a central archive and analysis center for all of the Republic's intelligence product. The massive staff of all-human analysts work in rotations of two weeks on and one week off. The Castle is not what you'd call a family-friendly workplace, and the six to eight hours of ID checks and interviews performed anytime anyone comes or goes would be prohibitive if workers commuted. In the spartan quarters and starkly monotone cube farms of the Castle, more than a couple of analysts have "gone postal," as we said in the olden days.

Aside from being an incubator for the neuroses of the analytical staff, the Castle also serves as a meeting ground for SCI, CBEAT, CDBI, and JSFI. SCI rules the roost, and doesn't let the other agencies forget it. As long as someone as able and feared as McFarlane heads up SCI, this isn't such a problem, but a weak SCI chief could easily make a hash of the combination of finesse and institutional brute force needed in the halls of the Castle.

MAUI PATERA REHABILITATION CENTER (IO)

Maui Patera takes every stereotype of an offworld penal colony and turns the knob to 11. The guards are casually sadistic, the inmates are just as brutal to one another, and the work—processing volcanic byproducts into useful chemicals—is extremely dangerous. Inmates who avoid burning, crushing, or dismemberment in the frequent industrial accidents take enough sieverts and inhale enough carcinogens that they're not likely to live long even if eventually released.

What gives Maui Patera that special edge is the absurdity of the place. The facility's logo is a pineapple, present on official communications and guards' insignia. The Hawaiian theme was developed by a no-talent prison reformer who wanted to give the inmates positive thoughts. When this hack was fired, their successor recognized the unintentional twistedness of it and ran with it. From it, the guards have derived an unofficial cartoon pineapple mascot that adorns shuttle nose cones, vehicles, and guards-only areas like the door to the mess hall. This, combined with their custom of greeting prisoners with "aloha" and each other with the thumb-and-pinky "hang loose" gesture, has resulted in survivors of Maui counting pineapple fruit cups among their PTSD triggers.

Security around the facility is high. The thin atmosphere and sweeping vantage point of Maui Patera's surface facilities makes the place hard to approach, even without the sensors, drones, and occasional human patrols covering the area. SCI has locked away here those they deem worst of the worst. Unfortunately for you, this means any Firewall agents they catch, since by their lights we're a terrorist group. We still have a few sentinels doing hard time there. No one has figured out how to break into the place yet.

INTERACTIONS WITH FIREWALL

McFarlane and a few of his senior staff are the only members of SCI in the know about Firewall's existence, *modus operandi,* and professed mission—and we don't think they have a complete picture. An SCI

SCI BLACK OPS

It would be irresponsible to talk about the SCI without discussing one of the ways they handle their deep black ops projects. Even within the security-sealed confines of a military dictatorship, it can be difficult to hide certain operations from bureaucratic oversight. When the SCI needs to get their hands dirty, one of their options is TAHI: the Terrestrial Ancestral Heritage Institute. This lobbyist group, with its enormously high percentage of ex-military officers, presents a powerful cover. TAHI gleefully takes on any black-budget affairs the SCI hands them, and the SCI makes sure that TAHI's coffers are always full. TAHI agents are often more well-equipped than military units, and are more likely to make use of proscribed tech. ■

field agent doesn't need to know anything about their target's politics before bundling them off to Io in an unmarked shuttle.

Civil Defense Corp Bureau of Investigations (CDBI)

Reports to: General Sergio Cauas, Civil Defense Corps Commander
Agency Head: Colonel Otavia Paz de la Luna

CDBI is the investigative wing of the CDC, charged among other things with domestic counterintelligence and counter-terrorism. As the police force of the Republic, CDC also investigates more mundane criminal matters.

History

The Civil Defense Corp originated as a militia during the Fall but quickly evolved into a paramilitary police force. The paramilitary origins show. CDC doesn't police so much as it maintains checkpoints and surveillance stations everywhere. Jovian society is so regimented that there isn't a great deal of crime, so this approach has lead to a fairly safe, if stifling, society.

Organization

CDBI is one bureau of several within CDC. Internally, it's organized into the following sections. True to its paramilitary roots, all CDBI officers carry military ranks on a pay-grade scale comparable to JSFI's. Each of the sections below is headed up by a lieutenant colonel or a major reporting to Colonel Paz de la Luna, the CDBI chief.

- **Biowarfare Section.** The susceptibility of the Jovian population to disease is a well-recognized weak point in the Republic's defenses. CDBI's Biowarfare Section (mildly derogatory nickname: "bugwashers") is in charge of biosurveillance, risk assessment, and supporting the Counterterrorism Section on biological threats.
- **COINTEL Section.** Counterintelligence detains more citizens and civilians each year than the rest of the Jovian security services combined. McFarlane's late obsession with rooting out anarchist infiltrators has a lot to do with this, but mass roundups have been par for the course in Jovian law enforcement from the beginning.
  COINTEL has a rivalry going with JSFI's COINTEL office—or at least, a rivalry from CDBI's perspective. JSFI, when they acknowledge them at all, see their opposite numbers in CDBI COINTEL as technologically disadvantaged, dangerously amateur, and sort of annoying. That COINTEL has no real channel by which to protest when JSFI peremptorily takes a case off their hands doesn't improve matters.
- **Counterterrorism Section.** Counterterrorism is the face of CDBI most familiar to average Jovians, as its uniformed officers man the innumerable checkpoints dotting Jovian habitats and carry out the stop-and-frisk searches that are routine on their streets. Checkpoints and stop-and-frisk teams, while baseline humans, are well equipped with sensor gear, including t-ray emitters and gait- and facial-recognition software.
  Undercover officers and informants are much less common, serving mostly as moles in suspect organizations. Plainclothes counterterrorism agents with elaborate cover identities have even been infiltrated into prison populations, where they try to ferret out the identities of prisoners' co-conspirators on the outside.
- **Criminal Investigations Section.** This section handles mundane criminal investigations—everything from drug trafficking to white collar crime. Stressful living conditions under the Republic combined with the inaccessibility of at-home microfacturing have ensured a thriving drug trade. Alcohol and cannabis are legal, but Investigations still does a brisk business combating trade in tobacco, opiates, entheogens, and cocaine—all of which are widely used. Much more rarely, a source of nanopharm or other drugs based on forbidden technology crops up, requiring Investigations to collaborate with CBEAT.

People

Colonel Otavia Paz de la Luna was a high-ranking FBI domestic intelligence analyst. Pre-Fall North America experienced regular bouts of social unrest, and Paz de la Luna distinguished herself rooting out dissidents and would-be domestic terrorists. By sheer luck, she was in Jovian space when the Fall occurred. She'd been leading the investigation of a gas miners' union that had been banned by the colonial authorities but quickly found herself with a much enlarged portfolio of responsibilities. Paz de la Luna is not a favorite of General Cauas, the overall CDC chief, having been installed in her post through the machinations of Zane McFarlane.

The Ranch

The problem with a militarized police force is that it doesn't produce the kind of officers who are any good at investigations. The Ranch, CDBI's training academy, attempts to correct this. The Ranch is notable for its kinesics training programs, which are some of the best in existence. Agents of the other intel service branches may temporarily transfer to the Ranch to participate. They're tailored to baseline human characteristics rather than relying on software and enhanced senses. The practical part of the kinesics course has one disturbing aspect. CDBI keeps a stable of transhuman prisoners representing a range of non-baseline facial structures and response patterns for student practice. Although a CDBI agent would almost never encounter a synth or uplift, their colleagues in other agencies, who also take these classes, might.

Interactions with Firewall

CDBI has labeled a number of Firewall ops as terrorist actions, but without connecting the dots as to whether those missions were the actions of a single group. Our own diversity of approaches and MOs furthers this obfuscation, but keeping CDBI in the dark remains important.

Council on Bio-Ethics and Advanced Technology (CBEAT), Office of Investigations

Reports to:

Salvador Morteña, Executive Director of CBEAT

Agency Head:

Dick Shiman, Director of Investigations

CBEAT, while staffed mostly by policy-makers and analysts, has a small investigative division of its own, charged with looking into suspected abuses of technology, employment of banned technology, and proscribed research.

History

The cornerstones of the present Jovian system are JSF's projection of force, the Security Council's politics of dominance, and the Council on Bio-ethics and Advanced Technology's regulation of technology. CBEAT's place in this triangle of influence would have been hard to predict in the years immediately after the Fall, and it was by no means assured. The Council started out as a group of civilian advisors attached to the Jovian Space Force, but it was more than just a group of concerned citizens; it represented religious, industrial, and financial interests. These lobbied for the legal framework in which CBEAT now operates. Participating, too, were notable minds in science and technology—or at least, those advocating a cautionary stance. This combination of influence and brainpower gradually earned CBEAT a place at the table and the full support of the taxpayers.

Full investigative powers are new to CBEAT's tool box—more fruit of their patrons' lobbying efforts. The Office of Investigations has existed for a scant three years. All the same, it commands some of the most talented and potently augmented agents in the Jovian intel community.

Organization

CBEAT is a civilian agency. The analytical wing has a corporate managerial structure, with analysts, managers, and directors. The investigative wing has field agents (usually just called "agent" in speech), senior field agents, and a director.

The following divisions make up the Office of Investigations.

- **Abuse.** Two-thirds of the field agents in Investigations work in the Abuse Division. Abuse is charged with investigating Jovian corporations and government agencies in cases alleging abuse of advanced technology.
- **Interdiction.** Interdiction's task is to prevent proscribed technology from arriving at or spreading within Jovian habitats. Off-hab, they work to break up smuggling rings. Inside, they're charged with tracking down and confiscating forbidden tech when it manages to spread via the black market.
- **Quarantine.** Quarantine is a small group of specialists whose expertise is in quarantining scenes where dangerous technology may pose a risk to those entering. This can range from sealing off a section of corridor to selective outgassing of hab sections to create firewalls of hard vacuum.
- **Retrievals.** Other than JSFI, Retrievals is the only branch of a Jovian security agency whose agents are regularly sent abroad. Retrievals has the job of salvaging proscribed tech for research when it's deemed an acceptably low risk. If operating near civilization (read: *Jovian* civilization), a Quarantine agent will often be assigned to ride shotgun with a Retrievals team.
- **The Spear of Longinus.** This paramilitary organization isn't officially associated with the government, but it receives 90% of its operating funds directly from CBEAT coffers. CBEAT uses this deniable organization when it needs to be quick, brutal, and dirty about something.

THE CRONY WAR

CBEAT and JSFI wage a continual, low-intensity bureaucratic war over the awarding of government contracts. This struggle has been described both as free-market competition versus an entrenched military-industrial complex and as CBEAT's Church-endorsed suppliers versus old soldiers gone private sector. Really, it comes down to cronyism on both sides.

JSFI has its preferred suppliers for spy gear, while CBEAT wields the big stick of being able to deny licenses to vendors it doesn't like. Theoretically, of course, CBEAT's job is to perform due diligence and license vendors based on adherence to technology regulations. But given the lack of oversight on their operations, it's easy enough when granting licenses for CBEAT to narrowly favor one vendor—their vendor—over whomever's bid JSFI is backing.

This turf war has been going on almost since the Fall, and it's exploitable. A well-funded social engineer bidding on government business as a front company can get a great deal of technology licensing and access to restricted areas if they find the right person in CBEAT to bribe. ■

People

Dr. Wendy Gilder, Chief Technology Officer on the Security Council, is practically a puppet of CBEAT. CBEAT uses her presence to upset their rivals' agendas. So far, Gilder is a pliant tool for them.

Salvador Morteña, Executive Director of CBEAT, pushed hard for the creation of an Office of Investigations. It was something of a triumph for him when the lobbyists' work paid off in CBEAT's favor. The Council has now for several years controlled a civilian intelligence agency with sweeping powers, even up to a mandate to operate outside Jovian territory under some circumstances.

Dick Shiman, Director of Investigations, was Morteña's pick to head up the new agency. They knew each other from work in the private sector. Shiman was a colonial security chief responsible for protecting the mining companies' holdings from industrial espionage. After the Fall, he served in the same role at a succession of Jovian corporations before being tapped by Morteña to head Investigations.

CBEAT Headquarters: Investigations Wing

CBEAT Headquarters on Amalthea is an ultra-modern campus set along one of the hab's immaculate parkways. Investigations has a wing off of the central building. Aside from office space, the wing includes quarantine units, labs, a detention block, a medical clinic, and a pistol range.

The Locker

This facility on the distant moon of Pasiphae is a warehouse, dug deep into the moon, jointly operated with JSF's Materiel and Logistics Corps. The Locker warehouses dangerous technology seized from the TITANs, exsurgents, exoplanets, and other polities. It does not contain labs. It's suspected that some of the devices and artifacts kept here might activate on their own if other devices are operated near them. Research that involves activating an item is conducted off-station, possibly on other nearby moonlets.

Interactions with Firewall

CBEAT's highest echelons know of Firewall but have kept this knowledge secret. CBEAT and Firewall's missions both clash and coincide where the disposition of TITAN, exsurgent, or alien artifacts within the Jovian sphere of influence are at issue.

Jovian Space Force Intelligence (JSFI)

Reports to: General Adam Westmoreland, Space Force Commander
Agency Head:
General Antonia Olivas, JSFI Commander

JSFI is both the intelligence service of the Jovian military and the Republic's principal foreign intelligence agency. In its military role, JSFI is responsible for assessing and reporting on the disposition and deployment of rival polities' military forces. In its foreign intelligence role, it's further responsible for gathering intelligence regarding their economies, their industries, their scientific research, and the activities of their intelligence services.

History

JSFI descends directly from the military intelligence services of the old USA, Chile, and Argentina. During the Fall, Zane McFarlane assumed temporary command of all intelligence assets embedded with local space forces in order to coordinate reconnaissance and intel gathering. This was a temporary state of affairs, but it set the precedent of JSFI taking its marching orders from SCI. Not surprisingly, few in the Space Force are happy with this continued state of affairs.

Organization

All JSFI operatives are commissioned officers in the Jovian Space Force and, as such, carry military ranks of lieutenant or higher. JSFI also employs non-military analysts, but all of these are Jovian citizens (i.e., ex-military). Civilians may not be employed, even as analysts. Major divisions within JSFI are composed of one or more battalion-strength military units tasked with activities relating to their specialties. Additional battalions may be formed at need.

The following units make up JSFI.

- **Analytical Battalions.** The 87th and 903rd Analytical Battalions are an amalgam of JSFI officers and embedded citizen analysts.
- **Deep Space Reconnaissance Battalions.** The 81st and 93rd recon battalions are tasked with tracking all space traffic in the solar system to detect incoming celestial bodies, ships on potentially hostile approach vectors, and other threats.
- **HUMINT Battalions.** Most of the Republic's foreign spies come from the 48th, 49th, and 53rd Human Intelligence Gathering battalions. HUMINT field officers are the cream of JSF's personnel and are regularly trusted with high-Equipment Threat deployments outside Jovian space. It turns out there's one caveat to the Republic's typical line on the dignity and empowerment of baseline humanity, and it's best summed up as: "War is hell." Encounters between Firewall and JSFI HUMINT officers have been plagued by failures—mostly due to the sentinels underestimating how heavily their opposition would be augmented. JSFI field operatives aren't augmented to the worrying degree that their opposite numbers in Commonwealth Fleet Intelligence are, but they're frequently on par or even better equipped than Firewall sentinels.
- **1401st Medical Battalion.** The 1401st is a specialized medical corps created to care for heavily augmented JSFI and CBEAT operatives. Since most Jovians have little to no augmentation, Jovian doctors have little practical knowledge of

implant medicine, caring for patients with biomods, resleeving, morphing disorders, and nanomedicine. They also have the wrong mindset, being accustomed to treating patients as if their present body were the only one they'd ever have. The 1401st is the sole medical organization in Jovian space with the full capabilities of a modern hospital or clinic. Impressively, its staff deliver care without the benefit of any of the AI assistants enjoyed by most doctors in the solar system.

- **Planetary Reconnaissance Battalions.** The 84th and 95th recon battalions are constantly on the move, with company-strength units embedded at strategic space stations and throughout the Space Force's fleet. Their role is ground-side surveillance of both friendly and hostile bodies—specifically via drones and satellite photography.
- **603rd Psy Ops Battalion.** A Firewall colleague who shall remain nameless once posted, "If you want a good chuckle, check out the bizarre scare messages these guys occasionally infiltrate into non-Jovian public AR channels." She was reacting to the one where people freshly awakened at resleeving clinics are subjected to a barrage of AR messages saying things like, "YOU'RE JUST A COPY," and, "THE REAL YOU IS DEAD." I'd find it funnier myself if I didn't live here. The 603rd has not mastered the subtleties of memetic warfare—and probably never will.
- **38th R&D Battalion.** The 38th is considerably above battalion strength if one considers the several thousand citizen analysts attached to it. Most of the actual research—on weapons and spy gear, captured technology from other polities, and the occasional TITAN trove—is done by citizens and takes place either on Amalthea, at the Castle, or (for hazardous tech) in the Locker. Officers of the 38th, while they often have a research background themselves, spend most of their time managing and monitoring the civvies.
- **Signals Intelligence Battalions.** Given the importance of electronic warfare in the present age, the Space Force has no fewer than a dozen SIGINT battalions responsible for keeping communications open, intercepting enemy signals, and interfering with the enemy's ability to talk to each other. Two of these battalions, the 11th and 23rd, are part of JSFI and are specially tasked with intercepting the diplomatic, intragovernment, and corporate comm traffic of rival polities. These two battalions also support HUMINT teams with both signals security and interception.
- **JSF Special Forces.** While nominally not part of JSFI, the Special Forces have two company-strength commando teams with the security clearances needed to accompany JSFI field missions as extra muscle. These troops may have the same heavy augmentations as actual JSFI officers.

People

General Olivas, commander of JSFI, is a protégé of Space Force commander General Adam Westmoreland. As such, Intelligence gets a lot of attention from the Space Force Commander's office. It shows in both the budgets and the quality of the talent assigned to JSFI. Both Westmoreland and Olivas chafe at having to clear intel ops through Zane McFarlane's offices. Olivas herself is notable for her quietly-held anti-biocon politics. In fact, they're why she was appointed to head Intelligence. Westmoreland needed someone who'd sign off on the augmentations that field operatives receive—which are far in excess of Jovian norms. The battalion colonels under Olivas are a mixed bunch. Politically, many of them are anti-biocons like Olivas. Others are expansionists that support the Republic widening its sphere of influence.

Lt. Colonel Darren Swirsky is the highest-ranking Firewall asset in JSFI, but unfortunately, he's assigned to the 603rd. Swirsky crafted the persona of a crackpot memetic warfare theorist and used it to barter his way into a lead role in the psychological warfare battalion. More playing his own game of media-troll-with-a-cause than Firewall's, Swirsky is behind much of the blunt absurdity of Jovian attempts at memetic warfare, all the while garnering approving nods from his superiors.

Firewall has, on the whole, had a difficult time infiltrating JSFI, perhaps because the dissatisfaction with the regime that leads so many of us to Firewall is much less pronounced within its ranks.

Liberty Station Office of Intelligence

JSFI's headquarters is a wing of modules dug deep into the asteroid to which Liberty Station is anchored. The second most secure place in the Republic after the Castle, JSFI HQ houses offices, meeting rooms, living quarters, emergency supplies, a backup fusion reactor, an armory, a detention block, interrogation rooms, and redundant data centers.

Security troops are lightly augmented but otherwise the best trained and equipped the Republic can field. Rooms are arranged in three concentric rings that can be cut off by bulkhead doors. Heavily augmented field operatives are only allowed into the outermost ring. Security feeds and surveillance are always actively monitored by multiple human sysops. The only thing the security arrangements lack on the Castle are the sheer length of SCI's grueling interviews and ID checks for entry.

Interactions with Firewall

JSFI's most senior staff are the only ones aware of Firewall. The Eye is classified as a terrorist organization, with little concern spared for its goals.

Senate Accounting Office (SAO)

Reports to: Office of the Vice Commander
(in their role as President of the Senate)
Agency Head: Eustacia Wibble,
Comptroller General of the Jovian Republic

The SAO's role is to ensure the fiscal accountability of the Jovian government by auditing disbursement of public funds and investigating any suspicion of irregularity or malfeasance. While not an intelligence agency itself, I include SAO here in part because its investigations often cross paths with the activities of the intel community, and in part because its investigative powers make SAO inspectors valuable Firewall recruits.

History

The SAO is the direct descendant of the old United States government's Government Accountability Office (GAO). The primary difference between it and its predecessor is that while the GAO made its findings freely available to the public, the SAO reports only to the Jovian Senate.

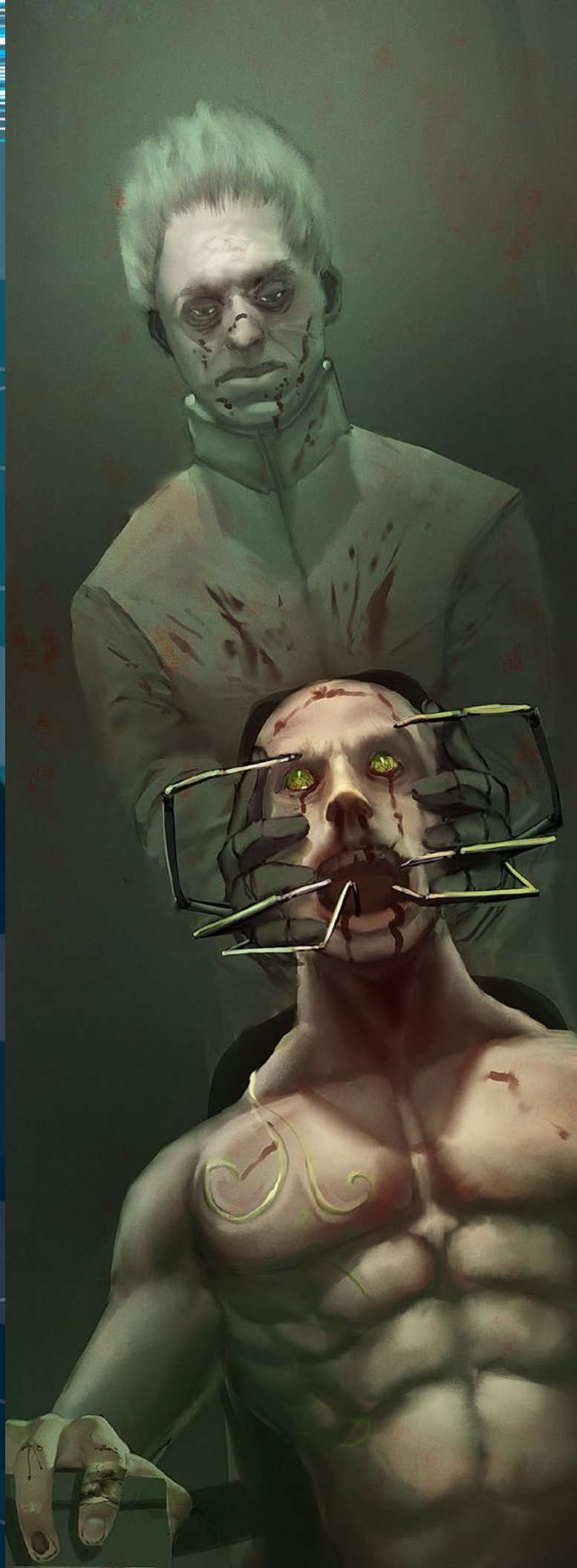
Our Senate is widely accounted a rubber-stamp legislature, a toothless assortment of windbags that blow where the lobbyists and the Security Council would have them blow. This is true from the standpoint of an outsider or an average Jovian. But there's an intricate dance that goes on in the halls of power, one that our betters never invite us to see. Given restrictions on resleeving and life extension, even Security Council members' numbers will eventually come up. When they do, the masters of this dance—senior senators, governors, politically minded military officers, and lobbyists—all play a role in the transition of power. In the meantime, the dance goes on, and the Senate Accounting Office is one of their chief tools for gaining advantage.

SAO Inspectors have a surprising level of access to classified government information. The secrets of intelligence agencies and their operations may be a closed book, but their ledgers aren't, and from these a great deal of information can be inferred.

Several recent SAO investigations have targeted CBEAT and JSFI. This is another front in the bureaucratic war over whose contractors to favor. SAO smells malfeasance in the water, but what else might they find if they follow the money? It makes for an opportunity from Firewall's standpoint, as sentinels undercover in the Senate Accounting Office currently have unprecedented levels of justification for snooping on both CBEAT and Space Force Intelligence.

Organization

As a civilian organization, job titles in SAO follow standard lines for a governmental accounting agency. Most of SAO is an undifferentiated mass of bean counters from Firewall's standpoint, with the exception of the Division of Investigations. Investigations is organized somewhat like the detective branches of a police department. Several chief inspectors report to Comptroller General Wibble, with about a dozen senior inspectors under them, and about a hundred regular inspectors doing the grunt work. Inspectors do the field work for SAO's army of comptrollers, associate comptrollers, assistant comptrollers, CPAs, lawyers, and clerks, of whom there are probably several thousand.



PEOPLE

Comptroller General Eustacia Wibble is an iron abacus in a velvet glove. Formerly a high-ranking auditor in the old US Government Accountability Office, Wibble happened to be in Jovian space overseeing an audit of security contractor operations when the Fall hit. She impressed Monica Contreras with her ability to provide an accurate picture of available funds and raw materials during the ensuing chaos and has had the Commander in Chief's ear ever since. Those who wonder why the Republic doesn't implode under the weight of corruption need look no further for an answer; it's because Eustacia Wibble is watching.

Managing Associate General Counsel Marek Baumann, of SAO's legal arm, is a Firewall asset. Quietly Extropian in his politics, Baumann believes that the Republic is steering the wrong course. Baumann's position is that of legal point person in assessing whether SAO has cause to act on a given matter. From there, he can steer Firewall assets toward suspicious activity in the intel community.

LIBERTY CITY LEGISLATIVE OFFICE SUITES

SAO occupies a large but spare suite of offices in Liberty City. As with the Castle, the number of human staff working here is bloated by the usual standards. The Jovian prohibition on AIs and infomorphs means that a sizable staff of accountants, analysts, and admins is needed to perform the SAO's work. The Investigations branch has its own corridor with cubicles and individual offices, but this area is no more or less high-tech than the rest of the place.

INTERACTIONS WITH FIREWALL

Like CDBI, SAO has crossed paths with Firewall operations without realizing what they were dealing with. Every so often, an audit trail dead ends at an operation or initiative involving the Eye. The few people in JSFI and SCI who know of Firewall aren't about to clue in a bunch of legislative branch bean counters.

OLIGARCHS

Posted by:
Dread Locke, Firewall Sentinel <Info Msg Rep>

The term "oligarchs" is a useful label for a diverse collection of individuals. Of course, it's a mistake to treat them as a uniform group. They all have their own individual, unique interests, and they pursue them with the vast resources, enhanced intelligence, long-term strategic planning, and dedicated, ruthless cunning for which they are infamous.

Every society that doesn't correct for equality and opportunity has its royalty, and transhumanity is no different. There's no denying that the oligarchs have a head start on the rest of us. They had the wealth and privilege to get in on the ground floor when humanity first started augmenting our capabilities and extending lifespans, and again when we started installing cortical stacks, resleeving, and buying customized bods. Most of them have hypercorp connections (if you could call being CEO or chairperson—or having one in your pocket—a connection). Some of them are royalty in the true sense of the word—they're descendants of actual kings and queens or other nobility from Earth. Some were just

A WORD OF CAUTION

Posted by: Cacophonous, Firewall Router
<Info Msg Rep>

Any sentinels interacting with oligarchs should take special care. The foresight and cunning exhibited by oligarchs makes them formidable opponents—and treacherous allies. It should be expected that they have contingencies in place for almost all conceivable scenarios. Though a few them can be considered philanthropic or invested in transhumanity's future, most are likely classified as intensely self-interested. When dealing with someone who is always a step or five ahead of you, spontaneity and unpredictability are your best allies. Likewise, they are unlikely to engage in any relationship which does not reap them long-term benefits, so keep in mind that they may simply be using us as means towards a larger goal. That said, their resources are vast, so take advantage of them when offered.

One other thing: the psychological effects of advanced longevity are still unknown. Most oligarchs are not willing to submit to psychological evaluations, and those that do have not opted to make their data widely available to researchers. The boredom and ennui that characterize many oligarchs may have a biological component. The human mind did not evolve to live for hundreds of years, and the challenges that extended, collected memories pose—especially considering the "perfect" recall that cortical stacks allow—are a new and unexpected obstacle. While so-called Methuselah syndrome is not yet a recognized psychological affliction, it seems likely that the impact of perfect recall and memories that compile for decades beyond what the human mind evolved to handle does have an effect on the long-lived. Expression often seems to mimic certain symptoms of depression and anxiety, but may also manifest as lethargy, paranoia, recklessness, and other dissociative behaviors. In short: the mental states of long-lived oligarchs should be considered significantly different from transhuman norms and, as such, unpredictable. ■

really, really lucky and happened to have enough money and sense to recognize the winds of change and take advantage of them.

If I seem bitter, it's because these over-rich bastards are more than happy to keep resleeving into the latest and greatest morphs, tossing their old ones away like discarded toys, while millions still languish in infomorph hell after the Fall. They're the last vestiges of conspicuous consumption, relics of a bygone era, better suited to the near-slavery and feudalism of the Jovian Republic. They do not deserve respect, nor should we uphold them as paragons of virtue and leadership; they are parasites that thrive on the exploitation of others.

At the same time, the immense power they wield cannot be denied and there is no doubt that some of them have interests that cross paths with Firewall. As such, this report focuses on a few of the undying rich who could potentially be of some use to sentinels—or even considered friendlies. This is the best I could find on these guys. They don't make themselves easy to track. In a day when information is supposed to be free and transparent, you wouldn't believe the effort it took to pry some of this out of their systems.

Franko Abramsen

Franko Abramsen had a long and exemplary mercenary career before turning to consulting for Haller-Stromme, a Johannesburg-based security firm. As transhumanity spread across the solar system, Abramsen demonstrated a knack for predicting uprisings and security needs among the hypercorp-run colonies. Surviving media from the time shows a man consumed by paranoia—but almost always correct in anticipating violence and destruction.

When the Fall came, Abramsen saw his worst fears confirmed. He also somehow acquired significant wealth—current speculation is that his company's troops looted one of his third-world nation-state dictator clients, seizing and taking an entire nation's money off-world while leaving the despot and his family behind. Abramsen sold off his controlling interest in Haller-Stromme for even more riches and purchased his own O'Neill cylinder, located somewhere between Saturn and Uranus. He has since become a complete recluse. Even though he never leaves, Abramsen continues to purchase derelict habitats and mined-out asteroids for his pet project: New Svalbard.

From what we've gathered, Abramsen packs each habitat with seeds and genetic material from Earth species as a safeguard against the total annihilation of transhumanity. There are at least a dozen of these New Svalbard "arks" floating around the solar system and one in orbit around the exoplanet Luca. They are entirely automated, with security systems programmed to open fire on ships attempting to approach. Though his work seems similar to ours, and the backup faction within Firewall has taken some interest in him, there is evidence that suggests Abramsen might not be so benevolent; our data indicates that the only human stock being archived is Abramsen's own genetics and backups. Nevertheless, some backups have discussed infiltrating these arks to deposit other transhuman genetics and egos.

Stefan Habsburgh

Stefan Habsburgh claims to be a living decedent of the Hapsburg family, who controlled large swaths of Europe during most of the last millennium. He's a gregarious playboy, making the most of his wealth and power within the Consortium to live the glitterati lifestyle. XPs of his bedroom exploits—including some forking and sleeving combinations I can only call creative—are some of the hottest media to hit the meshes.

Stefan is also a major investor in more than three-dozen mining and research operations in the outer system. Many of his ventures operate at a net loss. An investigation into some of these habitats and colonies revealed that the mining operations seem to be a cover for a number of unusual construction projects. We've ascertained that at least one is creating capsule seedships, another is building data storage, backup, and egocasting equipment—the kind that would be incredibly useful should we need to evacuate large numbers of transhuman egos quickly, as we did during the Fall—and most interestingly, an armory of hardened bots specifically designed to fight TITAN war machines.

Whether this is good planning, has a larger business purpose, or is simply paranoia on a grand scale is unclear. Habsburgh has never stated any support for any such endeavors publicly, and in fact his media persona seems carefully crafted to convey the image that he is a carefree socialite, unburdened by plans for the future and looking forward only to the next entertainment. There is evidence, however, that suggests that Habsburgh may not be acting alone—or that he may even be a puppet for someone else still operating from behind the scenes.

Rook

Intelligence on Rook is frustratingly sparse. We know that this entity is well funded and has more than a passing interest in the TITANs, Factors, Earth, the Pandora gates, and various other things that are also of interest to Firewall. We also know that Rook is aware of Firewall, ever since their agents captured and mind-probed several sentinels a few years back. Rook has even offered assistance to Firewall on several occasions, going so far as to intervene in our favor, unasked. On one of these incidents, Rook's agent suggested that their employer was in full support of Firewall's goals. However, the number of times our sentinels have found themselves at cross-purposes to Rook's interests—or have at least come out holding the short end of the stick—imply that we cannot trust Rook's motivations. We suspect Rook has links to Stellar Intelligence, several singularity seeker crews,

and prominent members of the X-Club—though these may all be pawns or alliances of opportunity. In a similar vein, we know that Rook seems to have enemies—likely other oligarchs maneuvering their pieces in a similar way. Until we know more, sentinels are advised to treat Rook with caution and as potentially hostile.

Zarah Rostami

Zarah is the daughter of a powerful Iranian family that profited greatly from Western development in the Middle East in the early 21st century. She took over her father's business when she was only twenty-five and spearheaded development into many of the early technologies (the Masdar project, for example) that would become the cornerstones of transhumanity's spread to the stars. She holds several advanced degrees in physics, engineering, and biology, and helped design several kinds of habitats.

Rostami considers herself a kind of an artist, and operates several habitats scattered throughout the main asteroid belt strictly as biological curiosities for the wealthy and lucky. One of her most popular is a low-gravity ocean where tourists can sleeve into uplifted dolphin morphs.

The reason Rostami appears on Firewall's radar is her active and ongoing interest in the Pandora gates. Rostami is believed to be financing a private research initiative into gate functions, with the intention of cracking the code on how they work to bring the gate network more fully under transhumanity's (or perhaps Rostami's) control. As she has also stated, better control of the gates means that we can protect ourselves more readily against any intrusions by returning TITANs or other alien threats. While there are numerous efforts sponsored by other factions—and even other oligarchs—for this purpose, Rostami's is notable due to her success at poaching some of the top gate experts from rivals. There are also strong indications that they have achieved a recent breakthrough, allowing for a more nuanced understanding of gate addresses.

Nuan Zhang

Nuan Zhang was one of the first Chinese colonists on Luna, having bought herself a seat there using her family's industrialist wealth. As one of the key decision makers in charge of labor and mining practices in the early days of colonization, Zhang amassed a vast personal and political fortune. When the Fall came, she quickly egocast away for a bolthole on Titan, where she has resided ever since.

Zhang was recruited by the argonauts, and acts as one of their chief representatives in the Commonwealth. Her knowledge of mineral exploitation, especially Luna's Hydrogen-3 mines, give her a strong background in geology and mining practices. She seems to have experienced a change of heart since the Fall, devoting most of her resources to the argonauts' cause—which she has referred to publicly as "philanthropy." The argonauts seem only too happy to work with her; she's a legitimizing element for their organization.

Zhang has personally spearheaded many of the argonauts' exploration missions to the Kuiper belt and Oort cloud, including the probes traveling to Tyche. She has advocated for the establishment of an inhabited research station on Sedna (and the removal of its current inhabitants, the Dead Eye Society) to take advantage of the dwarf planet's extreme orbit.

Religious Groups

Posted by:

Cacophonous, Firewall Router <Info Msg Rep>

Major religions have been on the decline for decades now, and they suffered a serious blow during the Fall. Though waning in influence, several religious orgs continue to play a public and influential role. Behind these, however, several smaller and more furtive groups operate, some of which have interests aligned with Firewall's, at least in the sense that they actively oppose x-risks and extinction.

Societas Iude

Posted by:

Tio Silencio, Firewall Router <Info Msg Rep>

Let me tell you of your allies in the Jovian Republic. I say "allies," but I must ask: is the bee that makes the honey an ally of the farmer who harvests from the hive? You must understand not only what we do, but also the why.

There is no Society of Jude. And yet, there is. We count two dozen among our membership. Most of us remember old Earth: basking in the sun in St. Peter's Square, debating the finer points of history and Church doctrine with some of the most educated individuals transhumanity has yet produced. We are all members of the Society of Jesus (Jesuits by our common name).

Many of us were scattered when the Fall came: some conducting research, others conducting mission work. We were the far-flung emissaries of the Church. Like our founder, Ignatius of Loyola, we dedicated ourselves to learning and discovery, and in so doing to bring further glory to God. It is only through understanding the entirety of God's creation that we can properly give Him thanks for it.

There are those in the Church who want nothing to do with transhumanity, especially those outside the Republic. The level of safety that the Republic's insularity affords is comforting; when the TITANs return, none will be more ready than we to deal with it. But we cannot forsake our brothers and sisters outside of the Republic either. Transhumanity is still humanity.

Perhaps that is why we do what we do. Before the Fall, we lived among the stars. We worked alongside those who studied the celestial bodies. We brought

hope to those who despaired in the darkest mining ships flung to the far corners of the Kuiper Belt. When the Fall came, we answered the call to return to the New Vatican, but we could not forget what we saw among the stars.

Transhumanity and its problems are not as simple as those who hold power would have you believe. To turn our backs on the people who need us the most would be a most grievous sin. When we realized this, the Societas Iude was born.

The Society of Jude

Our namesake is the patron saint of the hopeless cause. Perhaps there is more truth than irony in our moniker. After all, what could two-dozen old Jesuits actually accomplish when the Church has taken such a conservative turn—and its power is diminished to the point of near-irrelevance outside of the Republic?

How much do you know of Church history? Not just the political rallying cries—but the actual history?

In many ways, the Church today is not vastly different from the European Church following the sack of Rome as the last vestiges of the Western Empire fell. As the Empire collapsed and various kingdoms fought for the scraps, the Church itself was responsible on a larger scale for preserving learning, law, and order—but on a smaller, more individual scale, for fulfilling the vast psychological need for both purpose and belonging that the Empire once satisfied.

There are those who will, no doubt, accuse me of whitewashing both history and the current political reality of the Church. For as much as the law was preserved and order maintained, the Church after the Empire fell was also responsible for stifling inquiry, for maintaining the feudalistic power structures that kept the vast majority of people in near-slavery, and for using its power to increase its wealth and landholdings.

I won't bother to draw the lines for you from that Church and the modern-day entity that has become such an important part of the Jovian Republic.

And yet.

That was the Church that created the Franciscans—those individuals who care nothing for the Church's power and ministered directly to the poor and needy.

This is the Church that has created our Society of Jude. We are political traitors and dissidents because we have walked among the poor and needy, the lost and forsaken, and decided that we could not turn our backs on them. We defy the Republic's laws and the Church's dogma because doing so is the very definition of being Christ-like.

As our understanding of the universe and transhumanity's place in it has changed, so too has our understanding of God. Most of us are what you might call agnostics. In the end, that does not matter. What we do matters; how we act matters. To be as Jesus taught is not to venerate God while forgetting the weak and oppressed. It is to wash the feet of the lepers, to befriend the prostitutes, and to break bread with criminals.

General Curia of St. Thaddeus

Our chapter house is located in a remote arm of Liberty City, high above Ganymede. To the untrained eye, it is nothing more than a simple library and a meeting room, filled with a handful of pre-Fall artifacts, including a few relics that managed to survive.

Behind the walls of old books—all long-since digitized and spread across the mesh—is our real space. Housed within is our private mesh server with our own copies of both old books and new media, including complete copies of all media censored within the Jovian Republic. Here also is living space for up to ten biomorphs, our own nanofabricator, and a databank housing our backups with an emergency egocast antenna.

We also have the ability to farcast to a habitat in the Kuiper belt if anything goes truly wrong; we made enough friends in our travels that a sympathetic group of anarchists agreed to take us in should the Church or the Republic discover our operation.

Key Members

I am **Tio Silencio.** What you need to know about me is that I am originally from one of the extinct nations of South America. I knew from a young age that I would join the Church; I saw how the poor in my village were treated, and how the local priest fought to give us a voice. I knew, if I had the chance, that his fight would become mine. And so it has.

We are fortunate enough to count one of the Council of Bishops among our number, **Bishop Conlis.** Conlis spent many years on Titan, and his family held considerable political influence in pre-Fall Europe. He has made it his mission to subtly guide the Republic's policies through his Council position, and counts several moderate, reform-minded political appointees among his personal successes.

The traditional orders of nuns have all but died out in the modern Church, but **Sister Agatha** is one of the last surviving members of the Sisters of Mercy. She was born a man back on Earth, entered the priesthood, and eventually sought my help in resleeving into a female morph and falsifying her records to appear as a natural-born female. Because of her personal experiences, she is one of the staunchest defenders of transhumanity outside of the Republic, and has helped set up a charity for non-citizens looking to leave and establish a more fulfilling life elsewhere.

It is appropriate that St. Jude's symbol is the club, for **Brother Ferrum** is our cudgel. He may be one of the oldest living members of the Church, but he still feels the fiery passion of a person a quarter his age. Brother Ferrum has dedicated his life to establishing civil and economic rights for the oppressed, and it is only his venerable age and extensive political connections within the Church that have kept him out of the Republic's jails.

Final Thoughts

Understand that the Church measures time in centuries, not in years or even decades. The institution will change; it must. It always has. If we are discovered and wiped out tomorrow, if the rest of transhumanity is eradicated and only the Republic survives the TITANs' return, then hundreds of years from now, someone will still continue our work.

In the meantime, we will continue to minister to liberate the oppressed and protect all off transhumanity. As the winds of secular politics will no doubt eventually change, we hope to bring our cause into the light someday. Until that time, we will continue to assist Firewall in whatever way we can.

White Butterfly

Posted by: Selah Razah Karim,
Firewall Proxy <Info Msg Rep>

Asalamu'alaikum. It has been too long since we last corresponded, and I hope this message finds you in good health, with the blessings of Allah upon you.

I have compiled what information is relevant about the White Butterfly. I admit that there may be far more to know about them than what I have been able to find; I beg your forgiveness for the incomplete nature of the information. Many of my normal channels closed to me as I began making inquiries for this report; I believe this is relevant, and have included additional information in my analysis.

What We Know

The White Butterfly is a group of Martian Sunnis best described as radical reclaimers. Their exact size and composition is unknown, but many of the individuals who contributed financially to the founding of Qurain and survived the Fall are included in their number. Their hands are deep in Consortium politics, and at least one oligarch has made the White Butterfly his personal pet project. You may recall the nasty business about that airship and the TQZ a few months ago; rumors are that the White Butterfly had something to do with that.

I, for one, believe those rumors are correct. From what we've been able to find, members of the White Butterfly have consistently backed Consortium and Tharsis League efforts to reclaim the TQZ—and Qurain in particular. They have provided top of the line combat morphs to at least one Barsoomian reclaimer group, and weaponry to others.

Their financial trails also lead to several Consortium politicians who have rammed measures through the Planetary Congress to fund military operations into the TQZ. The odd thing is, these operations did not seem to match reclaimer goals. In almost every case, the target seemed to be cortical stacks, hostage infomorphs, or something else locked away in a databank in the Zone.

Zaheed Bousaid

Zaheed Bousaid is the third son of a family who made their fortune from oil in the late 20th century and had the foresight to invest heavily in the infrastructure of countries like Dubai and Egypt in the early 21st. He saw the migration to Mars as a tremendous opportunity to expand his wealth, and pumped money into Qurain. He took the Fall harder than many; although his fortune remained intact, he began funneling vast amounts of it into various public works projects within the Consortium: parks, open spaces, mosques—even synagogues, temples, and churches. He has openly come out in favor of vast Martian preserves, which puts him at odds with the League's terraforming efforts.

If White Butterfly has a leader, or at least a figurehead, it would be Bousaid. He enjoys the glitterati life in Valles while quietly recruiting other Martian Sunnis to his cause. Despite his history with Martian economic development he has managed to avoid association with any of the hypercorps; the feeling seems to be largely mutual.

Dr. Nawar Darzi

Dr. Nawar Darzi made her name as a biological terraforming expert; her work on extremophile bacteria was instrumental in early efforts to begin changing Mars' atmospheric mixture. She routinely lectures around the inner system and has even been invited to medical conferences in the Jovian Republic. Publicly, she's as apolitical as possible, considering her life's work and reliance on hypercorp grants. Bousaid once employed her, and they've been fast friends ever since.

Dr. Darzi's recent research has suggested several biological and biomechanical methods for fighting back against the exsurgent virus, or even the possibility of engineering nanoswarms that could attack and adapt to TITAN threats.

I have not met her personally, but her rep in academic circles is so high that I feel I could vouch for her theories. She is based on Mars and does most of her lecturing at the university there, but like many other academics makes the most of consulting opportunities for the hypercorps.

Hayder Abd al-Wali Abujamal

Hayder Abd al-Wali Abujamal is the opposite of Bousaid: young, brash, and openly political. He came to Mars as an indentured worker, stuck in a synthmorph in a Noctis slum. He worked with other labor organizers, anarchists, socialists, and those now deemed "enemies of the Consortium," pushing constantly for more rights and freedoms. You may recall some of the ugliness with the indentured workers who were sentenced to imprisonment as infomorphs; al-Wali Abujamal was one of those, but someone engineered his release by buying out his sentence. I suspect, but cannot prove, that someone was Bousaid.

Hayder is White Butterfly's organizer: he still makes political appearances, but does so within the boundaries of Consortium law. He's been elected as imam of a sizable Martian Sunni population in Noctis and has used his position to find other Martian Sunnis interested in taking back Qurain. He has also hinted that if Qurain could be retaken, then it would be God's will that Mecca and the entire Earth could be as well—the first would be the proof that Martian Sunnis needed to engineer the second.

What We Suspect

White Butterfly is not simply interested in reclaiming Qurain from the TQZ. From the conversations I've had with the few members I've been able to identify, the group believes that Qurain is merely practice for the much larger goal of liberating Mecca on Earth, returning the possibility of true hajj to the Brotherhood, and perhaps even being the leaders of the total liberation of Earth itself from the TITANs and exsurgent virus.

Analysis

Forgive my speculation as I deviate further and further from verifiable data. White Butterfly has the potential to be a Firewall ally, insofar as they share some of the same basic goals of reclamation. However, from what I have seen, for a group with as many resources as White Butterfly has at its disposal, it should be more effective an organization than it is.

That could mean two things. First, like any loosely aligned organization with more money than sense, White Butterfly simply doesn't have the cohesion necessary to work as a unit without putting each member's personal goals before the group's. Or, it could mean that they have yet another, shadowy motive and the liberation of Mecca is simply a front for something else.

I want to stress that I have seen no evidence of any sort of ulterior motive, and therefore personally lean towards the first solution, but my analysis would be incomplete if I did not at least mention the second possibility.

The Cause

As a Muslim myself, I would by lying if I did not say that the liberation of Mecca did not fire my imagination on some level. I did not get a chance to conduct my hajj before the Fall, and I would welcome the opportunity to lay my eyes upon the Ka'aba. I know many other Muslims feel the same, even those who were born off-planet and never knew the beauty of old Earth.

To put my analysis another way: if White Butterfly wished to become a political or religious entity, rather than a hobby project for dilettantes and the Martian Sunni glitterati, they could easily gain membership among the Brotherhood.

Contacting the Butterfly

Posted by:
Jake Carter, Firewall Sentinel <Info Msg Rep>

I made contact with Dr. Darzi last year at a lecture on terraforming efforts. Firewall has classified her as a potential friendly contact for some time, and I found her to be an astute scientist with some truly revolutionary ideas. I admit that I do not understand her theories on bacterial information, but the results of her work on Mars cannot be denied.

Agents looking for a way to work with White Butterfly should consider Dr. Darzi as their best bet for initial contact. As Saleh noted, she stays out of Martian politics, but her sympathies clearly lie with helping transhumanity, and in my estimation she'd be willing to get involved if we could prove the need—and act as an "in" to the Martian Sunnis for non-religious sentinels. ♣

Titanian Agencies

Posted by: Tara Yu, Firewall Crow,
Titan Autonomous University <Info Msg Rep>

On Titan, we like our government agencies tidy. Tidily transparent, tidily organized, tidily correct. Nothing vexes the Titanian mind more than the suspicion that somewhere, someone in government is doing something that one didn't get to vote on. And yet, in a society where virtually everyone serves in the military at some point, there's also the recognition that secrets have their uses. The space between the Plurality's appetite for accountability and its need to champion our socioeconomic system leaves a dark space—a spook world where exigencies trump idealism.

We've invited monsters to dwell in that world, reassuring ourselves that they're our monsters. For now, at least, the monsters are playing along. But the fact remains: the Titanian government is the most benevolent state-level entity in transhuman space—until you cross its security services, at which point it is pure evil.

Organization

Taking a page from our anarchist neighbors, and following our own mania for egalitarianism, Titanian agencies tend toward flat organizations. Hierarchy exists, but every attempt is made to minimize managerial positions by using AI agents to coordinate work and compile reports to the agency head. Every agency has an AI engineering department that spends its time fine-tuning the expert systems managing everyone's work. In an emergency, each AI has a human backup designated to temporarily take over management.

The exceptions to the above are Fleet and the Civilian Intelligence Directorate, where a more traditional command structure is still the order of the day. A system of checks and balances exists between these

two agencies, however, starting with their reporting to two different ministries in government.

Transparency

Access to secret information is a thorny problem in a parliamentary cyberdemocracy. It used to be that such information, if it had to leave security agencies, was at least concentrated in the hands of political elites who had a great deal to lose if they failed to handle it carefully. But the nature of elections in the Plurality means that new ministers can come out of nowhere. Thanks to the influence of factions like the Pirat party, Titan has no overarching state secrets laws. To counterbalance this, CID and Fleet Intelligence devised a unique system of delivering intelligence briefings.

Orchestra and Attachés

CID and Fleet jointly maintain a corps of AI intelligence consultants called *attachés*. Their function is to advise their clients—ministers, ministerial staff, and occasionally special commissions of the Plurality—on intelligence matters. Attachés are expert systems that connect to the Orchestra, a system of predictive algorithms married with a sprawling intel database. They observe the conversations, internal deliberations, and official communications of their client. If the subject matter warrants, they will offer secret information, based on their analysis of the situation.

The attaché's access to the Orchestra is bolstered with kinesics software, learned knowledge of their client, and skillsofts loaded with subject matter knowledge (which, being skillsofts, also reflect the vaporous opinions of the person whose skills are being duplicated). Attachés may respond to questions from their client, but more often, they stay silent and offer information only when the Orchestra deems the situation to warrant it.

Attachés are sleeved into small bots, synths, ghostrider modules, or sometimes biomorphs with cyberbrains. They may be identified by a single thick, blue stripe running from forehead to jaw over the right eye. For synths and bots, an analogous marking is part of the construction or is painted over the "face." CID assigns them to the staffs of ministers, and they're a regular sight in Titanian diplomatic delegations. They almost never speak when anyone other than their clients are present, providing information via encrypted mesh communications.

The Orchestra is a highly controversial program. At its best, it arms Titanian officials with just-in-time intel to strengthen their decision making and negotiations. It keeps that intel secret until it's needed, partly solving the problem of a rotating cast of ministers having access to state secrets. Nevertheless, some in the Plurality want further reassurances. Who really controls the Orchestra? Who decides what its predictive algorithms decide that the attachés should dole out? Does it give too much power to CID? So far, the Orchestra hasn't been a source of scandal for CID and Fleet, but the topic remains a hot point of debate.

QUESTION OF PROTOCOL

Testimony of Theodore Lindquist, Secretary to the Vice-Minister of Trade, to the Plurality's Special Commission of Fact-Finding on "In-Context" Intelligence Briefings

Lindquist: I was at a meeting—at our embassy on the Bund—on 12 June, AF 9, between Case Hayes, a representative of the Fa Jing mining concern, and Vice-Minister of Trade Marcelle Wong.

Commissioner 1: You mean the Commonwealth's embassy on Mars, at Valles New-Shanghai?

Lindquist: That's correct. The purpose of the meeting was to warn off Fa Jing from "claiming" metal-rich asteroids it had no near-term ability to mine.

Commissioner 2: And the Vice-Minister was accompanied by her attaché?

Lindquist: Yes. The negotiations were proceeding poorly, and—

Commissioner 1: That's very subjective. Could you please clarify what you mean by "poorly?"

Lindquist: Of course. The Fa Jing rep wasn't giving a centimeter. When the Vice-Minister emphasized that Titan didn't recognize Fa Jing's claims, he replied that "acts of piracy" might draw a response from Fa Jing military assets in the disputed volume. That was when the attaché sent a burst of documents to our side of the table.

Commissioner 3: In mid-sentence, as it were? How did the Vice-Minister recover?

Lindquist: With aplomb, in my subjective opinion. Or, if you like, our own kinesics software barely registered her reaction. One couldn't say whether the Fa Jing rep did.

Commissioner 1: What happened then?

Lindquist: The Vice-Minister paused as if she needed to confer with myself and Ms. Eriksen, the representative from Off-world Metals Microcorp, but in fact she was skimming the documents provided by the attaché. Then she called Mr. Hayes's bluff. The killsats Fa Jing was threatening to activate were obsolete, barely a threat to one of our mining fleets, let alone those escorted by one of Fleet's corvettes. CID had known for years.

Commissioner 2: One assumes this turned the negotiations around?

Lindquist: Mr. Hayes promised to lodge a complaint with the Consortium regarding "Titanian expansionism," then retired. We had won the day, but then the Vice-Minister turned on the attaché.

Commissioner 1: Can you describe that interaction?

Lindquist: I can quote from my own recordings:

The Vice-Minister asked, "Attaché, why did you withhold this information previously?"

The Attaché replied, "'Withhold' is not a concept understood by the Orchestra, Madam Vice-Minister. The Orchestra provides information as context warrants."

"'Context' in this case should have warranted arming me with that information in advance of the meeting, attaché!"

"The Orchestra allowed for the probability that you could prevail upon Mr. Hayes without revealing CID's knowledge of their defenses."

"'Probability' in whose judgment?"

"We employ predictive algorithms, Madam Vice-Minister; we don't possess 'judgment.'"

"Then whose judgment is it?"

Commissioner 2: What was its answer?

Lindquist: It gave none. ■

Plurality members with A-Bloc or Pirat sympathies regularly propose legislation or special commissions to curtail the Orchestra, but so far, the Social Democrat center hasn't been moved by their arguments.

ZEROED BRIEFINGS

Another method occasionally used for balancing security with transparency is the zero retention briefing. Using this method, ministers or commissioners are administered a drug that prevents memory formation and are barred from using mnemonic augmentation or other recording methods. A third party monitors the meeting to ensure no tampering by either side, beyond ensuring the party being briefed remembers nothing. The minister or commissioners have enough time to absorb the briefing, make deliberations, and vote on further measures. They're then kept in isolation until the drug takes effect. The Plurality has its voice heard, but secrets remain secret. However, there are a number of special rules governing this meeting, including the possibility for the party being briefed to vote for wider disclosure of the information being discussed. If more than one session is required, the third party in charge of meeting security keeps an encrypted copy of the minutes which the participants can study at the beginning of the next meeting.

OPERATIONAL MEMORY HACKS

At least it can be said that the intelligence community eats its own dog food. Memory suppression or later memory editing are used on operatives as well. For operatives who see something they shouldn't, a trip to Fleet Intel's Office of Wellness may be in order. For agents operating in the field as beta forks, memory pruning before re-merging isn't uncommon. Whether some forks are simply deleted is an open question. But when it's known ahead of time that operatives will encounter things for which they're not cleared, they may be implanted with an involuntarily controlled

"TRANSPARENCY" AND EXISTENTIAL THREATS

You'll be shocked, of course, to hear that briefings and missions involving the TITANs and exsurgent activity are frequent-use cases for various memory hacks. It's tempting to blame Fleet for this zeal in keeping secrets, but the Ministries of State and Justice and Equality are quietly supportive of the policy. Of the ministries discussed here, only the Pirat-controlled Science Ministry stands in opposition. ■

narcoalgorithm or drug gland that administers doses of the long-term memory suppressor known as grey ranks. This drug can prevent memory formation for over a week—albeit with some side effects.

THE "TITANIAN SCHISM"

I once consulted with the Titanian Civilian Intelligence Directorate. Now I'm a proxy. The explanation isn't one you're cleared for yet, but its effects are referred to as the "Titanian Schism."

During the Fall, Titanian academics and allies from Kronosian space formed Survival Research Agenda. It was a think-tank devoted to analyzing the enemy, probing for weaknesses, securing Kronosian space, and exploring lifeboat strategies should the inner system fall. The Agenda was non-governmental but formed a consulting relationship with CID. But the Agenda, not beholden to the government, also consulted with the argonauts, proto-Firewall operators, and even sometimes inner system polities.

There's long been talk of turning Firewall into an above-board organization. In the early months post-Fall, Commonwealth territory was considered as a base of operations. The Commonwealth government was democratic, it could offer military protection within its own territory, and Survival Research Agenda members formed a significant bloc among Firewall's founders. Ironically, it was this last group that ended talk of going overt under Titanian protection.

What happened is known only to members of the Agenda, and to those in the proxy community with a need to know. The effects were plain. The Agenda's membership split almost down the middle. Some threw in their lot with CID or Fleet Intelligence, while others cut their ties to the Titanian intel community and embraced Firewall instead. It's arguable which organization was hurt more. Firewall lost access to Titanian resources and protection, CID and Fleet lost a potential alliance to an organization with huge off-world HUMINT-gathering capabilities, and both lost brainpower.

Relations are cordial as long as neither organization pushes the other too far. At least as regards the TITANs, "the enemy of my enemy is my friend" is the prevailing stance. Both sides have moles, but none in positions of power, as both Firewall and CID/Fleet's screening processes are aggressive in winnowing out double agents. Tit-for-tat exchanges of information aren't unknown, although neither side will fail to press its advantage if contact occurs where it has the upper hand. For Titanian Firewall agents, though, the question of divided loyalties comes up regularly—not least of all because both sides are always looking for new moles.

THREAT AWARENESS

Having seen action during the Fall, and having collaborated to some extent with the argonauts and other elements that would go on to be part of Firewall, the Commonwealth's intel services are well briefed on exsurgent threats. It's public knowledge on Titan that transhumanity's antagonists during the Fall (leaving aside human infighting) were machine intelligences armed with killer robots, nanoswarms, and the ability to corrupt or mutate biological lifeforms and machines alike. It's also well known that the machines were up to something beneath the surface of Iapetus, and that Fleet bombed the moon in response.

One thing the Titanian intelligence community hasn't done is to silo knowledge about the TITANs and exsurgents. No agency has a "TITAN Office" with specific authority over cases involving the TITANs or the exsurgent virus. The average Titanian operative potentially has much greater access to information than their counterparts elsewhere, provided they have a need-to-know and aren't shy about requesting it.

MINISTRY OF STATE: CIVILIAN INTELLIGENCE DIRECTORATE (CID)

Minister: Claudine Trudeau (Socialist)
Agency Head: Director Riika Järveläinen

CID is the civilian analysis wing of the Titanian off-world intelligence services. Reporting to the Minister of State, CID's functions include signals intelligence, mesh monitoring, analyzing surveillance data, and monitoring deep-space traffic for possible threats to Titan.

HISTORY

CID's history is entwined with that of Fleet Intelligence. Both came into being about 30 years before the Fall. The young Titanian state emerged during a time when the outer system was, to some minds, up for grabs. Autonomists were staking their claims on various moons and rocks, and just as often, governments and hypercorps sought to take control over them. The lines between settlers, merchants, and pirates were very fine in those days, and often crossed. CID began as a deep-space tracking and listening outfit, charged with monitoring radio traffic, ship telemetry, and exhaust flares. CID analysts scrutinized ships' communications, trajectories, and physical characteristics

AWARENESS LEVELS

Things that are not public knowledge, but are known to high-ranking intel officers and any agent with a need-to-know:

- The TITANs' primary weapon, the exsurgent virus, is highly transmissible and can rapidly corrupt both machines and biological life.
- Beyond planetary intelligence services like Oversight and the Jovian CID, there are two organizations specializing in gathering intel on the TITANs and the virus. One, Project Ozma, is a black-budget project of the Planetary Consortium. The other, Firewall, is a secretive anarchist affinity group operating as a loose network rather than a unified organization.
- The TITANs were building a planet-scale supercomputer beneath Iapetus. Exsurgent-infected colonists served as drone labor.
- Many former CID consultants from during the Fall now work for Firewall. Others might have gone over to OZMA.

Relative to Firewall, the Commonwealth's stance on other possible existential threats breaks down roughly thus:

- Exhumans are understood as extreme augmentation cases or singularity seekers. Given that CID and Fleet Intel practice extreme augmentation virtually as a condition of employment, the Commonwealth doesn't recognize exhumans as inherently threatening unless they behave as such.
- The Factors deal secretly with the Science Ministry and CID's Office of Science and Technology on a fairly regular basis. Fleet has quietly pursued the location of the Factor's base in transhuman space for years, but they've done so very cautiously and under false flags for fear of upsetting the apple cart that is trade in alien technology.
- The ultimates are deemed a major ideological rival and potentially a serious threat to Titanian security. The Commonwealth has watched their involvement with the Discord Gate affair and the seizure of authority on Kronos with particular unease. The gates at Pandora and Oberon are the focal points of a cold war that will certainly run hot if the ultimates make their move. ■

from sensor posts seeded all over the system. If a ship headed toward Titan or one of its outposts looked like a potential threat, CID issued early warnings to Fleet and Plurality. CID still performs this work today, but its portfolio has expanded.

ORGANIZATION

CID is divided into several offices whose AI managers report to the agency's head, Riika Järveläinen, a former officer of the Swedish UNDK. CID has no field operations arm. Ops and human intelligence are strictly the province of Fleet Intelligence. Physical security of CID facilities is handled either by the Security Police, or, for the highest security areas, by Fleet.

CID includes the following offices.

Asset Monitoring: Asset Monitoring keeps tabs on current and potential human intelligence assets. It works with Memetic Warfare and Fleet's Office of Human Intelligence to identify and recruit informants and operatives from other polities. It also analyzes intercepted messages from the Mesh and Signals Intelligence Office for threats to undercover human assets. Asset Monitoring never has direct contact with assets; this falls to Fleet.

Forecasting: The Office of Forecasting runs predictive simulations on everything from the likely path of asteroids in the Lagrangian Transport Network to the planetary economy of Mars. Employing massive computing power and no small number of AGIs, Forecasting also supplies combat- and defense-related simulations data to Fleet for both training and planning purposes. And then there's the GALDRABOK program, a collaboration between Forecasting and R&D known to employ asyncs—reputedly with precognitive abilities.

Memetic Warfare: This office monitors memes and trending topics in news and reputation networks. Analysts seek to identify memes that are threatening to the Commonwealth, as well as those that might be leveraged to its benefit. On paper, Memetic Warfare liaises regularly with its counterpart office in the Security Police, but in fact the relationship is a rocky one due to personality clashes between their managers.

Mesh and Signals Intelligence (SIGINT): This office eavesdrops on the corporate, diplomatic, and governmental communications of hostile polities. The Ministry of Justice and Equality has the power to appoint special attachés to monitor MSI's choice of surveillance targets (though not the content of the intelligence gathered). Usually there is at least one such attaché active at any time, reporting directly to the Minister of Justice.

Research and Development: The engineering wing of CID spends most of its time developing new software, new field gear for Fleet's operatives, and new SIGINT technology for deployment into the deep-space surveillance networks maintained by Fleet. R&D has also done research into the async

POSTHUMANS IN THE FOLD?

CID and Fleet Intelligence have a reputation for recruiting top talent and then pushing it to its limits. For some, the rewards in rep and Kroner are a draw; for others, the opportunity to work with the minds these agencies have brought together and the bleeding-edge knowledge they employ is reason enough. In either case, being heavily augmented and willing to push the envelope even further is a prerequisite for getting hired. Heavy use of forking—beyond what would be considered socially appropriate outside the spook world—is de rigeur. Analysts with multiple personalities are not uncommon and having multiple ghostrider modules installed even less so. Asyncs are especially prized as recruits.

Fleet's field operatives are also heavily augmented, sleeved in cutting-edge morphs with fine-tuned combat performance, sensory augmentation, or social advantages as appropriate to their roles. Where a permanent augmentation isn't called for, drugs are just as often used.

In this culture, the bounds of transhuman identity and social behavior are stretched thin. A CID analyst or a fleet field operative is called upon to take every performance advantage they can—social niceties about how forking, augmentations, and the like are used be damned. Fleet Intelligence's Office of Wellness keeps very busy dealing with agents whose stress levels have run too high. Plurality commissions of inquiry have leveled the charge that these agencies are flirting with a policy that approaches the ultimates' or even the exhumans' obsessions with performance enhancement. The leading lights in CID and Fleet, who are themselves heavily augmented, counter that Titan's intelligence community must pursue this course to keep up with other polities. ■

phenomenon, and a debate is ongoing about whether to go public regarding the existence of psychics. Doing so might enable Titan to be the first polity to create an organized corps of async agents, but so far, caution due to the mysterious origins of Watts-MacLeod has carried the day.

Science and Technology: S&T analyzes scientific and technological developments elsewhere in the system. This office is of special interest to Firewall because of its research into TITANs, exsurgents, exhumans, and black-budget hypercorp projects. S&T's Predictive Modeling Unit runs simulations of everything from inner system economies to potential space battles. Rumors that they have a large amount of hardware capable of hosting seed AIs are most likely true.

Space Traffic: This office fulfills CID's original role of monitoring deep-space traffic for objects potentially threatening to Titan, its holdings in the Belt, and its outposts elsewhere in Kronosian space. It also monitors potential threats to Titan's allies, such as Locus. CID's network of listening posts spans the solar system and several others where Titan or Titanian microcorps have exoplanet outposts. Updates from other systems come through asynchronously when gates open and data flows through from beyond. The actual listening posts are placed and maintained by Fleet.

PEOPLE

Riika Järveläinen, the chief of CID, has served through several administrations under both Socialist and Social Democrat Ministers of State. Somewhat unusually, she started out in the Office of Science and Technology. Most of CID's previous chiefs came from the SIGINT or Space Traffic offices.

The current manager of the Science and Technology office is **Domnall Uí Ceinnselaig,** a protégé of Järveläinen, whose theories put him at the center of the Titanian Schism. Both he and his counterpart in R&D, Svea Liefsdottir, are rumored variously to be either asyncs or borderline-exhuman singularity seekers.

THE SIXTH EYE

Sweden was once termed "The Sixth Eye." Thanks to its advantageous position for spying on the Russians, Sweden was chosen as the Scandinavian member of the "Five Eyes" SIGINT alliance between the old United States, the UK, and several British Commonwealth countries. Although the alliance that earned it the appellation ended before the Fall, it gave Sweden a massive head start in SIGINT and info-warfare capability compared to its European neighbors. The NAC-backed space colonies and the Titanian Commonwealth later inherited much of this capacity.

The SIGINT offices of Titan's intel services remain home to an old guard virtually unreformed in outlook from the Russo-Atlantic Second Cold War. Once servants of the Swedish Crown, never fully comfortable in their later allegiance to the NAC, and now oft alienated amid the newness of Titan, the old guard are varied in their politics and don't constitute a unified group. Because they possess the preternatural expertise of the hyper-aged, however, they often wield great influence. To mistake them for relics is foolish. The spook world is now the only one they truly know, and they're its elder ghosts. ■

Aileen Torsdottir, the current manager of Asset Monitoring, is notable for her efforts to monitor Firewall assets. It would seem her counterparts in Fleet's HUMINT branch are eager for more double agents.

Places

CID's main headquarters is in a wing of the Ministry of State building in Nyhavn. They also have major command centers aboard Skathi, Phoebe, and Abramsen, the fortified moonlets that are part of Titan's orbital defenses.

Relations with Firewall

CID is at the center of the "Titanian Schism." While there's some recognition that Firewall and CID are on the same side, sentinels should be as cautious in dealing with CID as they would with any other intelligence agency.

Ministry of Defense: Commonwealth Fleet Intelligence (CFI)

Minister: Jens Møller (Social Democrat)
Agency Head: Sky Marshal Rorik Sigurdsen

Fleet Intelligence is Titan's principal off-world intelligence agency and, as such, the one with which sentinels are most likely to come in contact. CFI is responsible for surveillance of other polities' military assets (both during and out of battle), human intelligence gathering, and maintaining the physical hardware for CID's signals intelligence programs.

CFI and CID are heavily dependent upon one another, but there is some friction between the groups. This is in part because they report to different ministers in government, and in part because one is civilian while the other is military, but most importantly stems from who has more authority. CID provides all of the analysis, but Fleet, with direction from the Prime Minister and Defense Minister, actually calls all of the shots as far as how the intelligence is used.

History

CFI has existed for as long as Fleet itself, having been formed during the early days of Titan's independence. The relationship with CID also dates to these times. Space battles are extremely deadly, tending to leave few or no survivors on the losing side, so the Commonwealth made the decision early on to keep skilled analysts off of ships. The buildup of a human-intelligence and fields-ops organization is more recent, beginning in the turbulent decade prior to the Fall and continuing up to the present.

Organization

As part of Fleet, all CFI operatives have a military rank. Fleet Intelligence is broken up into the following units:

Battlespace Surveillance: This office is organized into battlespace surveillance flotillas attached to fleets. Each has the responsibility for being the eyes and ears of a given fleet or fleet element.

Electronic and Nano Warfare: This office trains bug hunters. Sometimes, they're embedded in marine squads or with field agent teams. Heavily augmented for their task, E&NW operatives are virtually walking electronic warfare suites, prepared to counter any invisible threat their team encounters.

Human Intelligence Gathering (HUMINT): HUMINT forms the bulk of CFI's field operatives. Gathering officers contact

human-intelligence assets, perform up-close reconnaissance, undertake black-ops missions, and undertake any other tasks requiring an agent on the ground. HUMINT makes heavy use of *blanks*—psychosurgically modified forks of field operatives whose memories have been drastically edited to guard sensitive intel. Blanks retain their competencies, but have virtually no knowledge of their personal identities.

In a similar vein, CFI sleeper agents are the ultimate in deep-cover moles. Psychosurgery is used to give them almost completely new identities, with deep triggers capable of reactivating them as operatives.

For some missions, HUMINT also employs *vættir* (English: wights), advanced AIs bordering on sapient sleeved into synths or sometimes biomorphs. A vættr has the skills (or is loaded with skillsofts) needed to fulfill a given ops role, while lacking any personal identity or memories that could compromise operational security if it were captured.

HUMINT handles psychosurgical interrogations of captured enemy assets. Torture—at least as defined by the Plurality's numerous commissions of inquiry—is not used. HUMINT has far more effective and subtle tools in its arsenal. Time dilation and a featureless gray room work on almost anyone given enough processing power.

Finally, Fleet's mission commanders, especially those used in combat roles, are often so heavily modified both physically and mentally that they border on exhuman in their outlooks. A few are even known to be "reformed" exhumans, retained by Fleet for the extreme and ruthless practicality they may exert in a leadership role. If a given job needs an amoral sociopath driving it to completion, CFI has a list of candidates ready to go.

Navigation and Telemetry: This office deploys and maintains the hardware for Fleet's private mesh of deep-space monitoring stations. This includes both physical maintenance of satellites and IT maintenance of their software. Development of new software for devices in the network is done by CID's Office of Space Traffic. The hardware maintained ranges in size from can-sized repeaters to the room-sized encryption and comm suites on a Fleet destroyer, up to the massive arrays of directional antennas in Kronosian space that collect signals from all over the system.

Wellness: Wellness monitors and cares for the mental and physical health of CID and CFI agents. One of transhumanity's premiere psychosurgical care units, Wellness can bring damaged minds back from the depths of insanity—or rewrite a person's identity so thoroughly that they could never be spotted as an agent until activated.

PEOPLE

Sky Marshal Rorik Sigurdsen is the commanding officer of Fleet Intelligence. While technically outranked by Sky Marshal Iversen, the chair of Fleet's General Staff, Sigurdsen reports directly to the Minister of Defense, currently Jens Møller of the Social Democrat party. Sigurdsen came to his post in BF 5, and thus reaped a lot of credit for the agency's success in detecting and averting TITAN threats early in the Fall. Sigurdsen is a strong proponent of CID and CFI's internal culture of encouraging heavy augmentation among agents. His agency's successes during the Fall have fended off many questions about whether this is a good thing, but a decade later, the questioners are growing more bold. For his part, Møller has been keeping Sigurdsen on a tight leash.

Doctor Francoise Vieillard (nominal rank of Wing Commander) directs the Office of Wellness and its subordinate Psychosurgery Brigades. Vieillard, herself an MPD case with no fewer than 10 sub-personae, personally oversees preparation of blanks and vættir for some missions.

PLACES

Fleet has its own facilities aboard Phoebe, Skathi, and Abramsen, the three captured moonlets forming part of Titan's orbital defenses. The most prestigious off-world posting for agents is Valles Station, Fleet Intel's station in the Titanian Embassy on Mars. Their headquarters is in the Ministry of Defense building in Nyhavn.

RELATIONS WITH FIREWALL

If CFI assets with knowledge of Firewall make overtures to a Firewall team, the sentinels should consult with a proxy before making any reply. To date, Fleet has yet to outright interrogate anyone suspected to be a Firewall member. They have on occasion detained and debriefed sentinels, though their handling of them has been considerably softer than what a spy from a foreign polity could expect. This could change, and if it does, "deny everything" is the best policy. For our part, Titanian proxies are very careful in assigning missions that coincide with Fleet's sphere of influence. Sentinels going to places like Iapetus need to be extremely cautious in keeping their covers.

MINISTRY OF JUSTICE AND EQUALITY: SECURITY POLICE

Minister: Nadifa Samakab Geeddi (Socialist)
Agency Head: Director Håkon Aagaard

The Security Police are Titan's domestic intelligence service, charged with securing Titanian interests within Titanian territory—be it on-world or in outposts Titan considers part of its territory. The exceptions are military outposts, which fall under Fleet's jurisdiction.

HISTORY

The Security Police also predate the Fall. Their original mission was maintaining security at Titan's off-world mining outposts. Later, SP's portfolio expanded to include domestic counterintelligence, the need for which emerged during the stormy years leading up to the Fall. The Security Police have a somewhat tarnished reputation, being widely blamed for security

OTHER JUSTICE AND EQUALITY POLICE AGENCIES

Several other police agencies, with their own agency heads independent of the SP, operate under the aegis of the Justice and Equality ministry. The offices of these agencies with which sentinels are most likely to interact include the following:

- Commonwealth Police, Office of Investigations, handles physical and mesh-based criminal investigations planet-wide.
- Judicial Police, Office of Judicial Protection, is Titan's protective custody service. For infomorphs, this protection may go as far as a temporary stay in an officer's ghost rider module. ■

failures leading to the apparent sabotage of the Scoop, a Titanian megaproject to extract helium directly from Saturn's atmosphere into orbit.

SP's jurisdiction sometimes overlaps with that of the Science Police. This creates strain at present because the Justice and Equality ministry under Geeddi and the Science Ministry under Pedro Transfinity don't get along famously. Worse is their relationship with Fleet Intel. Since the Scoop fiasco, there have been several inquiries into whether CFI has infiltrated the Security Police. Fleet denies it, but Director Aagaard continues to lodge official protests.

ORGANIZATION

The Security Police are a civilian organization. Operations of the Security Police are divided among the following offices:

Counterintelligence: Cointel is the largest branch and runs domestic counter-espionage. Most field agents are part of this office. Agents include uniformed security details, plainclothes agents for VIP protection and investigative fieldwork, and paramilitary tactical squads. Some very high-value targets are monitored or physically protected by Cointel, including ministry buildings that lack their own security forces, the refineries at Marseilles on Prometheus (reputed to include Titan's main antimatter production facility), and (allegedly) the gate on Pandora.

Countermemetics: Countermemetics investigates and attempts to counter psy ops against the Titanian populace. Socialist sympathies among its personnel run so hot that it's on occasion gone so far as to classify certain types of advertising as psychological warfare.

Robotic Ops: Robotic Ops handles bot and counter-bot ops. They run and maintain the SP's notorious wobblycats—stealthy, extremely fast, cat-sized bots that can be loaded with surveillance gear or, much more rarely, munitions.

Special Debriefings: Using similar techniques to Fleet's HUMINT branch, this office handles psychosurgical interrogations. Under Titanian law, using psychosurgery, simulspace time dilation, and similar techniques in normal, civil, or criminal cases is illegal. However, they can be used on both Commonwealth citizens and off-worlders in cases of terrorism, espionage, treason, or memetic warfare.

PEOPLE

Director Håkon Aagaard is a career field agent who made a name for himself busting up a major kroner-laundering scheme by the Kron Kartelyeĭ and the Lunar banks. Aagaard's success brought down several prominent New Quebec politicos. He was just the white knight the Security Police needed after the Scoop debacle and was quickly tapped to replace the previous director, who resigned in disgrace.

Delandre Boucaut is the Deputy Director for Countermemetics, a socialist stalwart with rumored ties to the Technosocialist Interplanetary. He's remarkable for having been poached from CFI's Memetic Warfare division, bringing several key analysts with him. This hiring may have been Aagaard hitting back subtly at CFI and Fleet for their alleged infiltration of SP. Whether it proves worth the dust it stirred up remains to be seen.

Senior Agent Becky Transfinity is a codeline relative of Pedro Transfinity who heads Cointel's infosec division. What Becky's more famous relative thinks of one of their codeline working for SP is not known.

PLACES

In addition to their headquarters at Nyhavn's Ministry of Justice, the Security Police have stations at the Vakker Ordnance Works shipyards, at Marseilles on Prometheus, and on Pandora near the gate. They have personnel stationed at many non-military Titanian outposts, including exoplanet colonies. They do not, however, guard Titan's embassies. This is the function of the Commonwealth Marines.

RELATIONS WITH FIREWALL

Rank-and-file SP agents have considerably less access to information about Firewall than their counterparts in CFI and Fleet. Some senior agents and everyone of deputy director rank or higher, however, do know we exist. As far as SP is concerned, we're a non-governmental anarchist group involved in anti-WMD activism. Despite their counterintelligence function, the Security Police have standing orders from the Prime Minister's office to hand Firewall agents over to Fleet for debriefing. The SP doesn't like this much, though, and under Aagaard's direction, it seems like only a matter of time until they exceed their authority and attempt a real interrogation of a sentinel.

Ministry of Science: Science Police

Minister: Pedro Transfinity (Pirat)
Agency Head: Commissioner Astrid Lumière

The Science Police are charged with securing state-funded research facilities, investigating any wrongdoing that occurs there, investigating other matters pertaining to the scientific community, enforcing the Commonwealth's laws regarding sharing of microcorp research, and screening items brought back from exoplanets for safety. The Science Police are the sole civil police authority in a number of places that aren't Titanian territory proper but are under Ministry of Science purview, such as the warrens beneath Iapetus, state-sponsored exoplanet research stations, and aboard the *ICS-201 Crystal Wind*.

History

Titan is the undisputed scientific research powerhouse of the solar system. With possession of a Pandora gate, massive energy reserves, a legal system that requires microcorps to share their research, and a population who think it's cool to pour their surplus wealth into science and technology, how could it not be? However, as anyone who's spent time around scientists knows, they're not always the best behaved lot. This, combined with the keen interest of other polities in disrupting or getting a jump on Titanian research, lead to the formation in AF 3 of a police force answerable to the Minister of Science.

The Science Police and the Security Police have never gotten on well. The newly formed Science Police (acronymized "MSP" to avoid confusion with the Security Police) warned of infosec vulnerabilities in the Scoop project months before the disaster that ended it—warnings that fell on deaf ears in the Justice and Equality ministry. At almost the same time, MSP had its first major victory: Chief Inspector Astrid Lumière, now commissioner of the department, exposed a ring who'd been selling still-secret microcorp research to inner system hypercorps. The Science Police and their charismatic head became media darlings, a position they're still riding high on.

Organization

The Science Police are a civilian organization structured similarly to a regular police department. Each area of specialty is termed a district, each headed by a chief reporting to the commissioner.

Exocustoms: This district's primary operations are on Pandora, although they also have the power to inspect materials of exoplanetary origin entering Titanian territory from other gates. Exocustoms uses electronic scanning, biodetection, chemical sniffing, and a battery of other techniques to detect items that could pose a hazard. For items that are known to be dangerous, they inspect containment equipment and administer the permits needed to bring them through. Exoplanets that regularly export items to Pandora may have a permanent Exocustoms station on the exoplanet side of the gate.

Investigations: The Investigations District is the smallest section of MSP. Inspectors from this district investigate crimes occurring on or related to state research sites. They may also consult with the regular Commonwealth Police when the matter pertains to the science or technology communities. Cases regarding research authorship, falsification of results, malfeasance, neglect, and research ethics all concern this district. Where MSP is the civil police authority, this portfolio expands to include other criminal matters such as homicide.

Security: This district is the Science Police's principal uniformed service. Security District has stations or personnel at planetside state research facilities, at the Large Collider, at research stations beneath Iapetus, and at Marseilles on Prometheus, among other places. The security station aboard the colony ship *Crystal Wind* is nicknamed "the Barnard's Star Police District," although it will be some centuries before it lives up to the appellation.

Transparency: Originally part of the Investigations District until its task space grew too large, the Transparency District has the difficult job of enforcing compliance with the Plurality's transparency laws—specifically those pertaining to scientific and technological research. Under Titanian law, research enters the public domain once the microcorp that produced it recoups its initial investment. It's transhuman nature to hold on to a competitive advantage, though, making enforcement of these regulations one of the hottest topics in microcorp law. The Transparency District, far and away the least glamorous of postings in the Science Police, is thus its largest division.

People

Astrid Lumière, Commissioner of the Ministry of Science Police, leads the agency. Lumière's success as a Chief Inspector in the District of Investigations catapulted her to a promotion as agency chief—and launched the political career of her former boss, Natalya Iversen, recently elected as Minister of Information under the Social Democrat banner. A rare mixture of investigative skills and charisma, Lumière is immensely popular with the rank-and-file. A recent surprise appearance in a tan trenchcoat to perform the classical song "Never Gonna Give You Up" aboard the *Crystal Wind* has only enhanced her media standing.

Places

The Science Police headquarters are a small building at the Ministry of Science research park in Aarhus. They have stations or personnel beneath Iapetus, at major Titanian research stations, and aboard the *Crystal Wind*.

Relations with Firewall

The Science Police aren't aware of Firewall. Several sentinels serve in MSP, their actions on our behalf so far clandestine. Given that MSP currently reports to a Pirat Party minister, a witch hunt for moles seems

unlikely. Sentinels should still be cautious, however, as MSP's jurisdictions frequently overlap with the other security services, which are aware of us.

TITAN HUNTERS

Posted by: Wayra Isi,
Firewall Sentinel <Info Msg Rep>

Some people just aren't content to go quietly into the night. They're convinced—and we grant them the possibility—that it's only a matter of time before the TITANs return, or the quarantined ones jump their zones and finish what they started. Their mission is, simply put, to hunt down and destroy as many TITANs as possible.

On the surface, it seems their goals and ours are reasonably aligned. We have found that to be true in some instances, but before approaching a group of TITAN hunters, it is important to know the kind of individuals you're dealing with.

You know those vidgames where you play as the holdout hero during the Fall, standing against the TITANs while you evacuate your friends and family and cat, while bravely taking out dozens of those machines with nothing but a six-shooter? You know, that modern cowboy shit? Now imagine taking it too seriously, outfitting your morph like an online-gaming character, and then specifically ignoring the quarantine just so you can grab some glory and bragging rights that most of the rest of humanity will never know about. That about sums up your average TITAN hunter.

MAMBO'S MONGOOSES

Based in a seemingly derelict tin-can habitat in the junkyard around Earth, the Mongooses are a group of Fall survivors who managed to escape Earth and stayed behind to keep up the fight against the TITANs. They live entirely off the grid, violating the quarantine with impunity, and will shoot first and steal your morph before destroying your stack and not thinking twice.

Their leader, the Mambo, is the glue that holds the group together, and he's smart enough to know that he needs allies in his fight. We've worked with him on a couple of incursions to Earth and he certainly knows his shit.

The Mongooses operate somewhere between reclaimers and terrorists. Their habitat seems nonfunctional from the outside, but this is a clever ruse, perpetuated with a series of radiation leaks and seemingly random power spikes. The Mongooses claim to be able to egocast to and from several points on Earth, although even they admit that the risk of doing so is quite high.

From what we saw, their primary base of on-Earth operations is somewhere in the flooded tunnels of the old London Underground, and they egocast into morphs specifically created to survive among the layers of filth and endless darkness under the city. From the Underground, the Mongooses emerge to destroy whatever TITAN threat they can manage. It's a somewhat effective strategy: they've neutralized and destroyed swarms over several sections of the city, many of which contained valuable artifacts and former government offices, raising some speculation about the Mongoose's true goals. Whether this success has been replicated anywhere else on Earth is

HUNTER COUNTERPOINT

Posted by: Wayne Lighthouse, Firewall Sentinel <Info Msg Rep>

The truth isn't nearly so dramatic. Sure, there are some cowboy types, but these are brinkers who live among us: the very nature of their personal quest (crusade, whatever) requires them to live outside the law in most places. Certainly, those who live on Luna or Mars partake in their little hobby like Robin Hood and his Merry Men. We have contacts within some of the larger and higher-rep groups who hunt in the outer system and even through the gates. They aren't much different than other survivalist or next-Fall-prepper groups, apart from the fact that they happen to go looking for the trouble most everyone else wants to avoid.

Here's what you need to know: half of the so-called TITAN hunters are clown-shoes amateurs who have a hard-on for losing morphs and getting resleeved. The other half are some of the hardest of the hard, and few transhumans know more about killing TITANs than they do. They're also one of the few sources of reasonably up-to-date intel on what's going on back on good old Earth and in the TQZ.

The problem can be telling the two groups apart. Successful groups of the latter tend to attract the former, and some of the amateurs have tried to turn their exploits into real rep, which usually ends in a bunch of wasted morphs.

The groups below have a high-enough rep that we tend to trust their information. The only thing you need to know is that they trust Firewall about as much as they trust the authorities they hide from—or they're so deeply embedded within the power structures that revealing ourselves to them could be disastrous. To the renegades, Firewall is just another side of the same authoritarian coin: so-called experts telling them not to go hunt down and destroy what's responsible for the Fall. To the others, we're a mild threat at best and a clear and present danger at worst.

Proceed with caution. ♣

debatable; the Mongooses claim to have established beachheads in areas including the American Midwest, South Africa, Australia, and even a former research base on Antarctica, but our agents can only vouch for the London operation from firsthand experience.

The Mambo is on good enough terms with Firewall that he's classified as a contact, but not a friendly. If you decide to enlist his help, he will always ask for more in return than he thinks he's giving you.

McBride Family

The label "family" is a misnomer; the McBrides, lead by their enigmatic matriarch Aislynn McBride, are a tight-knit Barsoomian survivalist group that falls somewhere between religious cult and revolutionary militia. They're experts at avoiding the Martian Rangers and the League's authority, and likely have a series of bolthole habitats that allow them to survive and hide in the Martian wilderness.

McBride recruits from the Martian dispossessed and offers them a compelling vision: liberation for their homeworld won't come through fighting the League, but from eliminating the TITAN threat in the Quarantine Zone. She sees the League's lack of progress against the TITANs as a tool of oppression: keep Martians scared, and they'll continue to submit to the League's authority.

Whether her political theories are correct, the McBride family knows the TQZ better than any Martian, and agents looking to make an incursion into the Zone could not find better guides—even the Martian Rangers and zone stalkers don't know the TQZ as well as some of McBride's TITAN hunters. An actual meeting with McBride is unlikely unless you're ready to join the Barsoomian Movement in earnest, but many of her family members would be happy to act as guides, especially if they get the opportunity to add a few more dead swarm notches to their belts. Of course, that means a Family guide could put any operation into unnecessary danger. Finding them can be the challenge, however.

Operation Harvest

As far as we can tell, an unidentified agency or power within the Planetary Consortium funds this ongoing black-budget operation. First word of warning: don't bother looking for traces of it in the mesh, because even searching for information on it is bound to get you flagged and tagged. Here's what we know and what we suspect.

Operation Harvest was born after the destruction of New Mumbai to contain the exsurgent threat on Luna. Its membership is comprised entirely of ego forks of the best, brightest, and most deadly soldiers transhumanity has created; whether they are aware they are forks, or their forks are aware of them, seems unlikely.

There are two ten-person squads at any given time. Most of the time they exist as infomorphs in a private VR environment, which from what little data we've received seems to be a cross between intense military training and high-senses pleasure palace.

When called into action, Operation Harvest squads egocast into the latest military-grade morphs their sponsors can provide and are inserted directly into the action. They've made several successful incursions into New Mumbai to destroy suspected TITAN threats there, and someone in Operation Harvest has the ability to bypass the killsat perimeter around Earth, as they've landed and taken off successfully. Their methodology for doing so remains a mystery.

That's what we know for sure.

What we suspect is that the egos their Consortium sponsor uses for Operation Harvest have little to no knowledge of their actual goals or missions, and may very well be imperfect or insane forks of their original selves. There seem to be less than a half-dozen people in the Consortium who are even aware of Operation Harvest; our knowledge is entirely coincidental, as one of our nanoswarm flyovers of New Mumbai happened to catch one of their TITAN-hunting missions in the act, and we backtracked from there to piece together this information.

Harvest seems to exist entirely to help eliminate the TITAN threat. While this would seemingly make them potential allies, the privileged position they occupy within the Consortium and the levels of security surrounding their existence make any sort of alliance, even an informal one, problematic at best.

Sentinels who encounter Operation Harvest will be facing some of the best-trained, best-funded, and potentially the most insane soldiers the Consortium can field. Those who find themselves on the wrong side of Operation Harvest's guns will be in for the fight of their lives. However, consider friendly contact with Operation Harvest forks to be a high priority, if it can be accomplished.

The Ultimates

Posted by: Parallax, Firewall Eraser <Info Msg Rep>

While we're on the topic of ideological groups it's a good time to talk about the ultimates, and the first thing we're going to talk about is that almost everyone talks about them for the wrong reasons, in the wrong context. Even among Firewall proxies, the conversation is distressingly simple and shortsighted. It usually begins and ends with "they're fascist mercenaries who think they're the master race, and as long as they keep the talk about genetrash to a minimum with their clients, the inner system is happy to keep paying them to guard gates and fight exhumans." If we keep talking and thinking about them like that, we'll continue to fail at getting intel about their organization, and lose any chance of building any type of working détente with them.

Before you freak out, I'm not saying Firewall and the ultimates are going to be allies, or that we

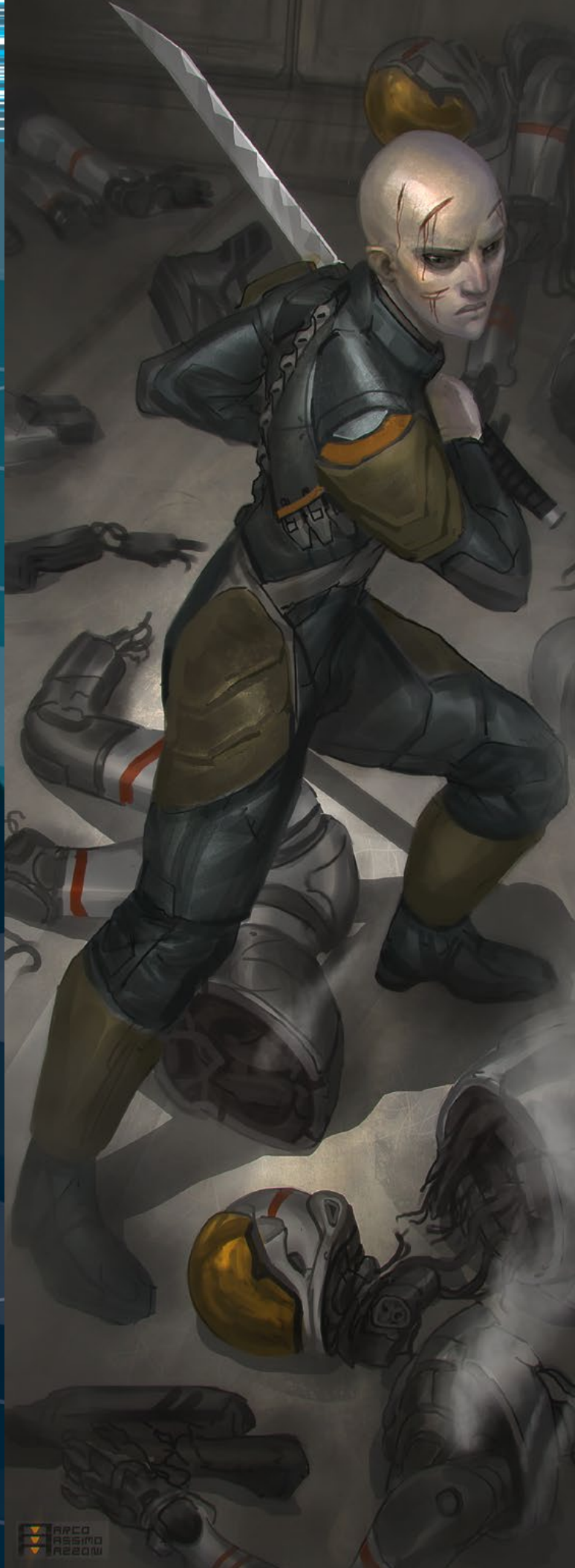
should be: there are large parts of their philosophy and operating standards that are just plain ugly, and there's a real chance that someday the ultimates could be an x-risk. For now, though, we need to wake up to the fact that there are a lot of different forces at work within the ultimates, and some of them are definitely sympathetic to Firewall activities. Alongside the nastier types of übermensch ideology, there's a huge focus on self-improvement in all areas of endeavor—not just physical and combat-related. There's also an extreme awareness of personal accountability to others within the faction and a very overt commitment to fight against the active threat posed by the TITANs and their leavings, the exsurgent virus, and any hostile aliens. The ultimates explicitly talk about the dangers of x-risks from those external factors, and acknowledge that transhumanity could well extinguish itself through its own stupidity. It may not be popular to say it on the Eye forums, but to me that sounds like enough common ground to at least try to have some framework for working with ultimates when we find them going after the same threats we are.

There are two groups within the ultimates that deal with what we consider potential x-risks: *purifiers* are their exsurgent/posthuman hunters, and the *rajput* are their TITAN-killers. I want to emphasize my choice of language there, because it was deliberate. The ultimates have cadres within their organization that are focused on hunting exhumans and exsurgent vectors, and eradicating TITAN-spawn. Firewall, Fleet, the Quraini and Martian Rangers in the TQZ, Consortium forces, hell, even the bastards with Ozma: we try to contain or manage threats like these because we believe we have to, but the ultimates have members who join the fight because they view it as a challenge or to prove they're better and more capable than what they're fighting. The difference in psychology is huge, and sentinels and even proxies running ops need to bear that in mind if they think ultimate forces might be in play during an op.

PURIFIERS

The purifiers began as the veterans of the ultimates' campaign to cleanse Eris of the exhumans that previously held the Discord Gate. Wiping out a major hive of exhumans with access to resources and reinforcements through a gate in a very hostile environment is no small task, and the soldiers who secured the moonlet, established the ultimates' very profitable relationship with Go-nin, and paved the way for the construction of the base at Pharos received a great deal of respect in their organization. Their faction isn't one to give promotions easily, however, so to acknowledge their accomplishments and their hard-won skill at fighting exhumans, their main reward was to formally add the title purifier to the ultimates' internal litany of recognized achievements. As the exhumans made further attempts on the Discord Gate in the years following its loss, the original purifiers that stayed on with the security detail there were able to lead newer ultimates into battle with them. Purifiers that moved on from Eris to other assignments carried their mark of distinction, and were included in actions that might result in conflict with exhumans and exsurgents.

In the past several years, the purifiers have developed into a distinct sub-group within the ultimates: almost a cross between a chivalric order and a special forces group. Growing out of the Pharos base, they are heavily influenced by the overhumanist philosophy prevalent at that station and view their achievements



and many victories against exhumans as proof that the ultimates are the best among transhumanity—and that the purifiers are standouts among their own faction. The small amount of field intel that we've gathered when they've been observed in action indicates that they track kills and even set themselves challenges, such as deliberately holding back their most effective firepower or equipment in favor of hand-to-hand kills, in-combat marksmanship contests, and the like.

Rather than quashing such behavior, the faction seems to encourage it. Those that can pull off such accomplishments are marked for advancement, and those that fail to meet the baseline performance requirements are pushed aside. This has kept the total number of recognized purifiers low—less than a thousand by all our estimates—but the individual members are among the best and the brightest the ultimates have to offer. The purifiers' reputation has also been talked up with other hypercorps aside from Go-nin, and throughout Planetary Consortium governments. That type of expertise isn't offered by Gorgon or Direct Action, and the spooks from Stellar Intelligence don't carry out heavy combat operations, so the purifiers are a market differentiator from their competitors, and they bring in a lot of credits for the faction. Anti-exhuman actions are also rarely in the public eye, so it gives the ultimates more intel on what's actually happening with exhuman activity across the entire inner system—maybe even more than us.

This is speculation on my part, but based on my own analysis of what little we know about deployments in and out of Pharos, there seems to be an active effort to keep personnel moving through that station regularly to get them blooded fighting exhumans in the semi-regular conflict that still goes on around Discord. This fits with the supportive approach the faction has taken towards promoting the purifiers, as it gives them a wider pool of talent that has a shot at entry, but I think there's a deeper play here as well. Given that Pharos is a bastion for the overhumanist philosophy—the real rot in their philosophy that says anyone who isn't an ultimate is inferior, with all the related bigotry—cycling members through Pharos to get indoctrinated then sending them out into the wider population of ultimates helps reinforce that viewpoint. Myron Chalmers, the recognized head of that school of thought, is also one of the first purifiers, and the current station head at Ariel. He has enough pull in the faction as one of their autarchs to make that happen.

PURIFIER OPERATIONS

Purifiers are deployed for combat and are likely to be some of the best and most heavily equipped personnel a sentinel will ever encounter in the field. Heavy armor with a range of environmental protections and defensive measures is standard issue, along with multiple weapons for extreme range, skirmish range, and close combat. Their weapons suites almost always include both energy-based and kinetic weapons. The most common assortment includes rail weapons for their high armor penetration, blades for close-combat versatility, and multiple pieces of single-use ordnance such as mounted seekers and grenades. Specialists with exotic weapons and spray weapons to help with area control are common in squads of ten or more. In terms of conventional weapons, sentinels should assume they will be outgunned by an individual purifier and will be at a huge disadvantage compared to a squad.

Given the ultimates' general focus on transhuman perfection, they make less use of drones and robots compared to other conventional military forces, and little to no use of AIs. This is the only area where a Firewall team could gain an easy advantage, as the more flexible skill sets they often possess may give them mesh and non-military hardware superiority. The ultimates are not unaware of this disparity, however, and usually have very strong countermeasures against electronic subversion: mesh and electronic countermeasures are always run by active network overwatch within a team.

Purifiers operate from a base of extremely strong, squad-based, skirmish-scale tactics and are adept at adjusting those tactics on the fly to account for changes in circumstance when combat begins. Cross-training on weapons and operating roles allows them to carry on effectively even if they suffer heavy casualties, and their morale is almost unshakeable: expect them to fight until they are all dead or subdued. When going into combat, most if not all morphs are equipped with either dead switches or neutrino farcasters to negate the risk of capture and interrogation.

Purifiers should always be considered high-threat forces, though with no inherent hostility towards Firewall. Sentinels should exercise extreme caution in dealing with them.

RAJPUT

Anyone who's ever looked at the Solarchive files knows that the ultimates saw a great deal of action during the Fall, with significant and well-publicized involvement during several major battles. Their first faction-only habitat, Struggle, was lost during the peak of the evacuation. It's less well-known that even after Earth was written off as a loss, the ultimates were heavily involved in defending Luna, in what appears to be their only pro-bono action on behalf of any non-ultimates. Their actions during the Fall have always been held up as an example of the faction's value and proof that their claims of superiority have merit, but that period is actually a major influence on their internal culture. The ultimates rightly believe that transhumanity is still threatened by the TITANs and the exsurgent viruses they unleashed, since they could return at any moment. To prepare

for and stand guard against such an eventuality, they have the rajput.

THE ROLE OF THE RAJPUT

The rajput are those ultimates that saw and survived successful action against TITANs during the Fall or against major TITAN remnants since then. We have almost no current hard data to work from, but extrapolating from info in Solarchive files from the Fall, somewhere between 150 and 200 would qualify. Only the most elite ultimate forces had any survivors, so these are all people that had decades of experience with the faction back on Earth. We can be certain they are deeply committed to the ultimates' core ideologies and overall success. Due to their prestige and commitment, rajput are widespread throughout the leadership of the entire faction. Based on analysis of the ultimates overall structure—habitat governance, major external operations for hire, internal R&D programs, and the like—rajput constitute up to 85% of the overall executive-level command.

Due to their commitments across the organization, the rajput are not a distinct group with a defined role the way that purifiers are. Rather, we should view them as a group with highly specialized shared expertise that is first and foremost a command-and-control element for the ultimates as a whole, secondly an ideological group that supports the faction's core philosophy of preparedness and survivability, and only lastly as a special forces division that can be assembled if needed. They are culture-heroes to other ultimates, and use that role to bolster their own authority and steer the faction's stance towards preparing for, fighting, and dealing with TITAN remnants.

RAJPUT OPERATIONS

Since the only time Firewall operatives are likely to encounter rajput is if we're all trying to deal with some active TITAN tech, here's what little we've got on their field protocols. Compared to typical ultimate forces in the field, the rajput almost seem quaint with their reliance on simple, analog war gear, which shows

MEMORIES

- Well-publicized is a nice way to put it.
- What do you mean?
- Think about what you've heard about the three big successes they claim from the Fall actions.
- They held the line at Sydney so the shuttles could get away, and they were the ones that breached the perimeter and took out the air defenses in the industrial city outside Beijing so it could be nuked. What have you heard about the space elevator?
- That they were the last ones on the ground before it got blown.
- I was there, near the end, and they did stay. A lot of multinational forces did, but they suffered casualties faster because their troops weren't walking around in 50,000 credits worth of armor and weapons, so it was mostly ultimates left near the end.
- That would be true no matter who was wearing the armor.
- Not the point. The refugees, myself included, were huddled in equipment sheds and offices around the elevator to take shelter from the fighting. Any time an elevator car was loading, a squad of them would come in, and their commander would pick who was going up: it was never the old, the young, or the injured. We were all "bōdā" to them: weak, feeble, dim-witted.
- Can't say I'm shocked to hear it, given their devotion to survival-of-the-fittest.
- What did surprise me was when a bigger squad than usual came in with bags of food—we'd been without food for more than a day at that point—and said they were leaving and taking us with them. They told us they were ordered to carry up the foodstuffs, but thought the weight was better spent on us. They said we had 10 minutes to eat, then we were going up. They threw bags of supplies into the crowd and it was chaos. People were brawling to get anything they could. I stayed clear and instead made my way over to the ultimates both to avoid the brawl and to make sure I was at the front of the line when they took us to the elevator: I knew we couldn't possibly all fit and wanted to make sure I could get out.
- As I got closer, the commander noticed me and waved me over with a smile. She said something in Hindi to the others with her, and they laughed. Then she called me "smart boy" and patted my head. She nodded to her soldiers, and they stepped forward, raised their weapons, and unloaded into the crowds around the food bags. I tried to run but she grabbed my shoulder and held me there, made me watch.
- Good god.
- It was a bloody mess. dozens of people down in seconds. When no one was left standing, the ultimates pulled out combat knives and moved through the moaning victims and started popping stacks.
- I tried to struggle, but I couldn't get out of her grip. The commander leaned down and said to me: "We can't take the weight of the food, so feeding it to them wouldn't help make our trip lighter. They're too heavy as well, you see, but—ah!—a cortical stack is so much lighter than both. You're smart enough to know that, even though you think me cruel. It is a kindness we take them at all, since they were not able to take care of themselves. You are smart, and perhaps have just been unlucky, so I will do you a kindness myself."
- I heard rumors … but … damn.
- I knew what was about to happen and I just stood there in shock. I watched her draw her knife and just stared at it. She called me brave and smiled again, then took my arm and sliced it open from elbow to wrist. She sang something to me, some little rhyme I didn't understand while I bled out. The last thing I saw was a bloody sack being dropped down next to me.
- Did you ever bring this to the courts?
- Nothing to be done. I wasn't woken up until AF 2, they were still heroes, and I didn't have any names or identification. I've never been able to find out what happened to anyone else that was there.
- Well-publicized is a lie. ♣

how much they internalized the lessons learned during the Fall. Much of the cutting-edge tech that typifies other ultimates' equipment and supports their tactics is nowhere to be found, for fear that it will be suborned or neutralized. The sole exception to this is the presence of robust anti-nanotech defenses. The rajput take the field with no networked personal equipment and hardly any mesh-enabled devices: they rely on the skills and experience of their individual members. Given that almost all rajput are ultimates who have been active with the faction since decades before the Fall, this means that, even without fielding current technology, they are arguably the most experienced special forces team in the system. The rajput also have access to a potent arsenal of analog weapons, including designs for purely mechanical flyers, ground vehicles, and artillery that they've continued to design and develop since the Fall. A spike in local industrial-scale fabbing facilities is a common precursor to rajput action, as they custom-print their analog materiel near where they plan on using it, since it would be a logistics impossibility to continually ship it from theater to theater.

As TITAN-killers, the rajput are only fielded as an unit when drastic, overt combat operations are called for. Even when such activity isn't publicized, it can be detected by unusual activity at industrial-scale fabbing facilities when the analog materiel is being printed, or via activity on passenger ships bringing in troops. There are a handful of known instances where they have undertaken operations against TITAN menaces since the Fall, including expeditions into the TQZ on Mars or the husk of New Mumbai on Luna. Some reclaimer groups chatter about hiring the rajput to escort trips to Earth, but that's only wishful thinking, as there's no indication the ultimates would ever sign on for that type of suicide mission.

Rarely, individuals or very small teams might be deployed to investigate or consult with other groups or governments about possible TITAN remnant activities, and this is the sort of action that might lead to contact with Firewall. If the investigation is an independent operation by the rajput, we simply have no idea what they could do. The possible skills and operating goals are almost impossible to plan for given the capabilities of their members, but we need to be careful that they aren't allowed to make off with TITAN tech. The ultimates are egotistical enough to think they could learn from it, and they have enough talent in their organization to possibly pull it off.

CONTACT PROTOCOLS

If you're thinking that my presentation of the ultimates paints them as a potential threat, you're right; I think they might be. I also know that their forces are among the best anywhere when it comes to facing down exhumans, exsurgents, and TITANs, and we need to be able to make use of that expertise when our interests coincide. Here are some operating guidelines that should help our people stay on the same side of the firing line when we come in contact, as well as improve Firewall's position for dealing with the ultimates now and in the future. We need a better working understanding of their organization and connections to their people, so we can judge when we're on the same side and when we need to oppose them.

RAJPUT ORIGINS

Transcript of a conversation between Nahia Gao, sentinel and covert operative, and Jordan Balcescu, ultimate exemplar.

Gao: Teacher, I ran across an honorific I'd not encountered before while reading on our history and martial accomplishments: rajput. What does it denote?

Balcescu: Glory, Nahia. Bravery and accomplishment in the face of stupidity and weakness.

Gao: I don't understand.

Balcescu: In Earth's ancient past, the rajput were the princes of India, sons to the kings and generals. As time passed and there were more kingdoms, more kings, and more generals, there were more rajput. In recognition of their lineage, and to meet the potential afforded them by their birth and advantage, they were trained as warriors from an early age, and taught to pursue martial achievement, and given the chance at positions of leadership. They became feared as fierce and peerless fighters.

Gao: That sounds unusually romanticized for any history worth teaching.

Balcescu: (Laughter) It most certainly is. Truthfully, they were simply a noble class that remained focused on the brutal work that their ancestors did to claim power in the first place. They fought to keep their privilege, and were taught to stand vigil against the threats that surrounded them. The rajput of our society are the same: they are the companions of Manu and leaders of our brethren who stood and fought the TITANs when Earth burned. The rajput alone can claim outright victory against TITAN forces during the Fall, at the scourging of Beijing.

If Manu is our philosopher-king, the rajput are his warrior-children, and proof that our beliefs and our culture are strong enough to stand against annihilation and hold firm.

Gao: Do they bear some mark or sigil that I may know them?

Balcescu: Those who stood against the TITANs and earned the name all receive a gift from Bhattacharya himself: a katar. They are to bear it with them always as a reminder to be ready to face the TITANs again. Remember this, for you still have much to learn, and more to prove, before you are ever likely to meet one of them.

Gao: Thank you, teacher. ■

Here are some guidelines for interactions with the ultimates:

FOCUS ON THE MISSION

If we're trying to kill exhumans, exsurgents, and TITAN spawn, take whatever help is available to achieve that result. Everything else is a secondary consideration.

DON'T TALK PHILOSOPHY

It doesn't matter what a sentinel's individual politics are compared to the ultimates'. If you're a polyamorous uplifted pig who's a member of a technosocialist commune and there's a purifier frothing at the mouth about the coming culling of the genetrash, but cooperating increases the likelihood of meeting your mission objectives, do it.

DON'T CAST THE FIRST STONE

The ultimates have a bad rep for overzealous combat action going back to the pre-Fall days. If there's contact during field ops, mission objectives come first, even if the ultimates aren't minimizing collateral damage. Remember that Firewall has plenty of blood on its hands as well. Think carefully and make the hard call about whatever injustice is happening compared to the results of intervening if it throws you into direct conflict with the ultimates and jeopardizes a mission.

OBSERVE

We need more intel on how the ultimates work, particularly special forces like the purifiers and rajput. Take in as much information as you can on their tactics, equipment, and combat methodology. Learn names, mesh IDs, insignia, anything you can pick up. Any details that might shed light on their internal dynamics and organization could be useful in the short term to help develop our own understanding of them as a group, and in the long term to improve our own operations with or against them as the situation warrants.

WATCH OUT AND CLEAN UP

These aren't hab security forces or Consortium military: they're a group made up almost exclusively of specialists and experts. The ultimates have their own factions and conspiracies, and they're as interested in Firewall as we are in them. If there's any chance they believe you're a Firewall operative, assume that they're actively documenting all interactions with you and that there will be subversion and surveillance attempts on your mesh and physical activities after coming in contact with them. Make sure all security and cover protocols are being followed aggressively, and exercise extreme caution in making any contact with other Firewall assets thereafter.

3

GAME INFORMATION

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This section provides new traits, new gear, and gamemaster advice for handling Firewall and similar organizations. A section of Sample Characters follows.

Introducing New Characters to Firewall

How you introduce player characters in your campaign to the Eye depends on how long individual characters have been in play and how Firewall operates in your game. Inducting characters into Firewall also involves navigating issues of player trust, working with player character back stories, and a bit of game mechanics.

New Characters vs. Established Characters

Starting a campaign with an entire group of new sentinels is simple. At minimum, establish how long each player character has been in Firewall, the name of their direct handler (be it a router or some other type of proxy), and a sketch of how they were recruited. Playing out an informal prelude flashing back to each player character's recruitment can be an effective way to flesh out more details. Decide whether the characters are junior sentinels with a few ranks of i-rep or fresh recruits still being tested.

Bringing established characters from a non-Firewall campaign requires set-up in the game itself. Firewall can be subtle about recruitment, but it's not above shanghaiing would-be sentinels and throwing them into the fight. This could mean literally dropping them into combat. Equally likely, it could mean employing unwitting player characters as contractors with full knowledge that the trail leads to the types of horrors sentinels need to deal with.

Finally, bringing a new, non-Firewall player character into an established sentinel team is potentially a lot of fun. The other players can have a chance to participate in the new character's induction. Perhaps one or more of the established sentinels are sent to extend an offer on behalf of their proxy, or perhaps they're ordered to put the new recruit through a loyalty test; just avoid letting this degenerate into hazing. Firewall loyalty tests aren't fun for anyone involved.

Working with Character Backgrounds

Player characters with developed histories might have hooks in their backgrounds that make Firewall recruiting easier. Close encounters with exsurgents, family tragedy during the Fall, Watts-MacLeod infection, or past run-ins with exhumans can all motivate a character to sign on. Less obviously, characters may be motivated by the excitement, access to secrets, or sense of purpose that Firewall can provide. Characters' motivations and skills are good to consider when trying to sway a character to join.

Establishing a Server and Proxies

Tell the players what their characters know about their starting proxies—which should be very little as the game begins for raw recruits. Now is also the time to tell them the cool server name you devised—if they're cleared for it. For new recruits, it's likely that the router and the vector responsible for secure communications will be their only contacts with the server. The more history the character has with Firewall, the more they're likely to know. Whatever the case, it's extremely rare for sentinels to know the real identities of their proxies. Exceptions can occur when a proxy recruits someone who already knows them from life outside Firewall. Recruiting personal connections is something few proxies do lightly, knowing the risks.

Behind the scenes, think about how each proxy in the server views the individual player characters. Backgrounds and factions can spur interest—or antipathy. Proxies aren't always above playing favorites. It's possible the other proxies in the server feel differently about the player characters than their router does. Tipping your hand a little about whom the proxies favor can add tension, although too much can badly fragment the group.

Running Background Checks

Proxies who use "liberated" forks of recruits to screen prospects can employ a variety of means, including accelerated sims or psychosurgery. Firewall uses its best to arrange forknappings, but they shouldn't automatically succeed against characters who've taken precautions. Roll some dice, and your players are much less likely to feel railroaded. Firewall can resort to more direct (if messier) means of testing high-value recruits who evade forknapping.

Psychosurgical examination of recruits uses Medicine: Psychiatry to determine whether the character suffers from disorders or dangerously low Lucidity. Building up a predictive model of a character to determine their willingness to join is done using a Psychosurgery Test (opposed by WIL x 3 as for performing a psychosurgery procedure). This is a Task Action with a timeframe of 1 week. If successful, the gamemaster may ask the player whether their character can be swayed to join Firewall at the present time; they must answer truthfully.

Some proxies run forks in simulspace beyond what's required for psychosurgery. This may include interviews conducted by one or more proxies, or it might involve placing the fork in a simulspace scenario such as Breakout (p. 89) to test their mettle and resourcefulness. Use the rules for simulspaces to adjudicate any

conflicts that occur. Firewall programmers may or may not have stacked the deck in terms of a given simulspace's physics model.

The recruits' reputation network activity also comes under scrutiny, as might their financial activity. Large favors or transfers of cred to or from the character by people or organizations hostile to Firewall are a red flag. Public mesh activity as well as hacked private information form the basis for a dossier summarizing the recruit's mission skills and other attributes. Networking, Research, and Infosec Tests by proxies can be rolled if there's any doubt as to the outcome.

It's up to you how much of Firewall's background checking is off camera. A fork's simulspace interview with potential Firewall handlers might be really fun to play, but it also gives away what's going on to the player.

Trust and Player Agency

Firewall's recruiting practices can be demotivating for players if run heavy handedly. It's a special point of concern if Firewall tries to recruit a non-Firewall player character in an established campaign. Some players are happy to be forknapped and roleplay their way through an interview with proxies without ever picking up the dice. Other players won't feel right if they're hacked, forknapped, given psychosurgery, and the like with no chance to resist. This is a game, after all. Use the tests suggested above as needed to avoid railroading. If at first Firewall doesn't succeed, they'll get creative.

Campaigns with Proxy Player Characters

It is possible to run campaigns with some player characters as proxies and others as sentinels. This works best with vectors, as they are often tasked with riding mesh overwatch on a sentinel team in the field. Though most other proxies steer clear of engaging in field ops, so as to provide a layer of insulation for Firewall's security, some servers break the mold and operate differently—especially if they have limited resources. Campaigns with proxy player characters must take care to give the proxies reason to put themselves out there on occasion, or else must allow for the proxies to operate separately, removed from the action but still involved. Though this kind of play is challenging, it provides the group with both the "outsider" perspective of sentinels and the "insider" perspective of proxies, which can be rewarding. It also provides a vehicle to have the team more involved in Firewall's internal functions, from rivalries between servers to the maneuvering and intrigue between opposing cliques. If you have a part-time player, who is only on hand for some sessions, given them the role of proxy who occasionally checks up on field work in person might also work out well.

A more cerebral type of gameplay involves all of the player characters playing as proxies. This is best handled with small server, composed entirely of the player characters, though it can also be handled with the player characters as just a small unit within a larger server. In a campaign like this, the proxies play a supervising role, directing the actions of NPC sentinels in the field while handling all of the research and calling all of the shots behind the scenes. This lends itself well to investigative and intrigue-laden scenarios, where the proxies themselves are only occasional forced to take direct action. It does, however, provide a great opportunity to pursue plots regarding Firewall's internal politics and factionalism.

One interesting way to handle the sentinel-proxy dichotomy is to have the players each make up two characters: one sentinel and one proxy. In this type of campaign, the players jump back and forth between their characters cut-scene style. This gives them the best of both worlds, enabling them to engage in more substantive field ops while still engaging with the back-scene politics and infighting.

Firewall Missions

Boring Firewall missions are rare. By the time proxies send in sentinels, they've usually got a bead on a problem. Sentinel legwork is just the last kilometer. That said, this leaves sentinels with plenty to do.

Types of Missions

There's no such thing as a textbook Firewall mission. The opposition is too freaky and protean, Firewall too unconventional and eclectic in its ways and means. With that in mind, it's best to think of the Eye's missions in terms of their objectives, which are roughly classifiable.

Recruitment and Loyalty

New sentinels' first introduction to Firewall might include missions intended in part or entirely to establish trust. Proxies might insert red herrings designed to test loyalty into otherwise legitimate missions. On more extreme occasions, proxies have mounted full-blown missions orchestrated to flush out moles or plant bad intel with double agents.

Loyalty missions are obscure beasts. A sentinel might play a supporting role in someone else's test of allegiance without realizing it. Experienced sentinels might even be asked to participate in extreme recruitment practices, such as stealing forks of would-be recruits for simulspace pre-screening.

Resourcing

Firewall avoids concentrating their resources in any one server. Having no treasury limits occasions for corruption, but it also means Firewall has to mount the occasional resourcing mission. New sentinels may find themselves tasked to commandeer vehicles/spacecraft, re-appropriate funds, or smuggle illegal gear to support other sentinel teams.

These missions aren't milk runs. Firewall avoids jacking spacecraft from crime syndicates, but the organizations they borrow from instead have a less-lethal but equally annoying capacity to retaliate. Protecting the trail back to Firewall is crucial.

Intel

Most Firewall missions start as intelligence-gathering runs. The problem space for these missions invites a wide variety of approaches, from hacking to physical surveillance to social engineering. Some gathering missions can morph very quickly into action-oriented field ops. In others, sentinels are moving parts, tasked to check up on a specific subject without being given larger context. The latter type of mission should be used sparingly, but it's a great tool for gamemasters who want to run long, twisting plots. It can be very rewarding for players when they realize the significance of a challenging but seemingly meaningless mission many sessions later. Just be sure to include enough clues to lead to the a-ha moment.

Turn and Burn

Sometimes the nearest cleaner squad can't get on scene quickly enough, and the work of tossing an installation for its secrets and then scorching the ground falls to player characters. Turn-and-burn missions generally include infiltration and aggressive infosec subversion followed quickly by a lot of blood and smashed bot parts. These missions present two challenges: gathering info quickly from the site being sacked and keeping the devastation from leading back to Firewall.

Mission Constraints

The following factors can constrain field operations:

Resleeving

Sentinels may be required to resleeve for a mission to protect identities, to erase trails back to Firewall, to travel by egocast, or to survive in hostile environments. Infiltration, impersonation, or the death of the sentinels on a previous mission can also result in a new morph.

Proxies try to have sentinels resleeved a few days before they go into action to allow for acclimation. Time constraints often mean this isn't possible, though. As always, when taking player characters out of their normal morphs, take care that Firewall-issued bodies don't make anyone's character less fun to play.

Civilian Population

Civilians are an intractable pain in the ass for sentinels, and the gamemaster shouldn't let them forget it. Panicky, unaware, and largely self-interested, the average transhuman subjected to an x-risk situation should at some point make player characters wonder whether they're worth saving. Biological exsurgent vectors in populous areas, hostage situations, and the reactions of civilian organizations all become part of the math for Firewall missions in densely settled places.

Traceability

Secrecy is Firewall's primary defense against criminal reprisals, political repression, and other threats to the organization. Sometimes half the planning for a mission is simply about making a clean getaway. Other times, teams may be called on to clean up after other sentinels who weren't so careful.

Factionalism

Factions within Firewall usually resort to debate and compromise when disagreements arise. Real conflicts are rare, but factions subtly influence Firewall's day-to-day operations. This influence manifests most noticeably in how proxies run their ops, sometimes complicating cooperation between Firewall servers with different operating procedures.

Handling X-Risks in Play

X-risks are by definition high-stakes events. Failure on Firewall missions shouldn't always equal mass death and destruction, though. How much you let the costs of failure shape your campaign is a matter of preference. Some gamemasters are fine with turning Mars into gray goo to prove a point about poor mission planning to their players. Generally, though, the costs start on a human scale, or the campaign has nothing to build toward. Turning an entire city block into exsurgents isn't necessary when turning a well-liked non-player character or a fork of one of the player characters will do.

Threats of this type will be detailed fully in the forthcoming *X-Risks*.

Threat Limiters

When it's finally time to let all hell break loose, don't hold back. But in the mean time, big threats can be limited in several ways to keep them from spilling over into the rest of the campaign in undesirable ways.

Distance

An outbreak of contagious psychic vampirism in a Kuiper Belt hab is bad, but it's not as bad as the same thing in downtown Shackleton-New Varanasi. Distance lets a sentinel team witness a threat up close while it's still far from the rest of the campaign. For this to create tension, though, the players need to believe that the threat will spread given time. A threat that can simply be quarantined is good for monster-of-the-week episodes, but not as a story-arc plot element.

Gradual Threats

Any potential apocalypse resulting from a blown Firewall mission can be planned in phases. If the players unleash disaster, give them a chance to go back and reverse it before things get too out of hand. Alternatively, give them a fallback position from which they can escalate operations to meet a threat that has grown. If the enemy has a sequence of goals to meet, the player characters can always thwart their next move if the first go is a wash. Be careful about scripting phased threats too neatly, though,

or you'll end up with a badly disguised version of the "assemble all the pieces of the magical artifact" cliché that every gamer knows from their junior high *AD&D* campaign.

Reinforcements

Frequently, this will mean the sentinels' own backups in whatever morphs Firewall could reappropriate. While sending in discount clones of the first team may reek of desperation, it can be effective if the enemy was also weakened and hasn't had time to rally. Take care in these cases to delineate between knowledge held by the deceased sentinels versus their backups.

Clusterfucks

When a mission fails, Firewall's response will, on a good day, be proportional to the stakes for the game world. How proportional depends on whether the sentinels brought back good intel before failing.

After deciding the effects on your campaign, consider the response from each of the proxies you have in play. Reaction from other servers could range from assistance to interference. Player character proxies, if you have any, may be put in the position of either defending sentinel actions or throwing them under the maglev train.

Once back in the field, player characters may face more scrutiny, new mission constraints, and possibly the "helpful" presence of personnel from other servers.

Using the Firewall Factions

Factions have uses for both plot and mood, so how you use them in your campaign will vary. Bitterly divided, double-crossing factions can be used to ratchet up paranoia and pessimism. In a campaign with little intra-Firewall conflict, they might be more like debating societies.

Backups

Backups are a small group within Firewall but wield a lot of clout because they tend to be unified on issues. To backups, the most rational response to the lack of knowledge about the enemy is to create isolated redoubts where pockets of transhumanity can persist even if the rest of the transhuman family is destroyed.

In the field, backups can seem a bit like conservatives in that they focus very heavily on containment. The less transhumanity's foes know about them, the less likely they are to find the backups' boltholes. On the other hand, there is a debate in the clique around "stealthing" transhumanity. Some backups fiercely oppose giving information to the Factors or to the entities contacted via the black pyramids of Giza, while others see these alien trading partners as potential custodians of transhuman biology and culture.

In mixed-faction servers, backups side with whomever is supporting their agenda. Since they've chosen to focus so tightly on one facet of Firewall's mission, their relations with the other cliques tend

to revolve around getting resources allocated to their plans. They also tend to be very focused on their own research initiatives and will often trade favors to support those projects.

Conservatives

Keep in mind that "conservative" refers to a position regarding Firewall's policies, not to an individual's politics outside the Eye. Anarchists and technosocialists are well represented in this faction. Whatever their extramural political beliefs, conservatives are the advocates of caution in Firewall planning. Underlying this advocacy are a variety of motives. Some hold concerns about the vulnerability of AGIs, infomorphs, and cyberbrains to subversion. Others, sometimes from the argonaut camp, are advocates of the precautionary principle.

In the field, conservatives are sticklers for containment protocol and will generally push for the destruction of TITAN artifacts, possibly dangerous alien gear, and other risky technology. While irksome to the pragmatist wing, even the pragmatists have to admit that they're sometimes right to take this approach. The more extreme conservatives tend to be deeply suspicious of AGIs and asyncs—to the point that some will refuse to work with them.

In mixed-faction servers, conservatives tend to see themselves as watchdogs. As a minority, they try to curb what they consider the worst excesses of the pragamatists rather than simply roadblocking everything.

Mavericks

Mavericks are a mixed bag, and if they have a common platform, it's that Firewall needs to be flexible to win the fight. Creating a monolithic organization or focusing too much in one area doesn't make sense when so much is unknown about the TITANs, their origin, and the nature of the exsurgent virus.

In the field, mavericks can be unpredictable. They make interesting non-player characters because of their tendency to pop in uninvited and assist other cells. Many are extremely security conscious, considering Firewall's structure to be too vulnerable to infiltration and disinformation attacks. Generally, mavericks are slow to trust other Firewall agents.

In mixed-faction servers, mavericks are a wild card. They almost always oppose structuralist plans for adding more hierarchy to Firewall, but beyond that are very individualist in their views.

Pragmatists

Because of their numbers, the pragmatists are a diverse group, but they unite around the twin pillars of inclusivity and calculated scientific risk (referred to by some pragmatists as *rizq—see p. 50*). This concern with rizq reveals something unspoken about the pragmatist mindset: they tend to believe transhumanity is playing from behind. Taking some risks—like retaining suspect TITAN artifacts or employing asyncs—is the only way for transhumanity to win.

In the field, this means that pragmatist proxies weigh calculations of rizq heavily when deciding where to deploy sentinels. They'll also mentor sentinels under their influence to think in terms of rizq when evaluating targets of opportunity.

In servers or teams of mixed faction, pragmatists are often the consensus builders—except when conservatives are in the picture. Although pragmatists believe the conservative attitude toward risks leads at best to a zero-sum game versus the TITANs, they can sometimes compromise with their conservative colleagues on matters of investigation vs. quarantine. Where bioconservatism or anti-AGI sentiment enter the picture, though, things are much less cordial.

Structuralists

There are two main sub-groups of structuralists: those who wish to turn Firewall into a more centralized organization but keep it independent, and those who wish to seek the patronage of a government or other large organization (for protection, access to additional resources, and the like). Many, but not all, structuralists support both positions.

In the field, structuralists push for well-defined mission roles. If anarchist, this might mean electing a leader for the duration of a mission, while other structuralists might push for the person with the most i-rep or relevant experience to call the shots. They might also be more prone to alerting local authorities about situations developing in their territory than other sentinels.

In mixed-faction servers, structuralists are the organizers—whether their colleagues like it or not. Among themselves, they tend to adopt greater centralization and hierarchy than other servers. This can create a lot of friction if a single non-structuralist sentinel has to work with a structuralist server.

Using the Eye and i-Rep

Firewall's new recruits are each given a unique cryptographic key and an identity on the Eye, which serves as the basis of their i-rep. Their identity is also assigned a security classification, which will change over time as they are cleared for additional projects and secrets.

The Eye functions much like others social networks, except that everyone uses a pseudonym and the discussion tends to be a lot more … interesting. A character's i-rep will have a large impact on how much additional support they can expect to receive from other sentinels and proxies. When a server's resources are already strained or limited, many agents use their connections on the Eye to acquire other information, gear, and backup. A character's i-rep will also play a factor in how often they are considered for and assigned new missions, cleared for new security levels, and potentially even promoted from sentinel to proxy.

Seeking information and favors via the Eye can be liberating in comparison to other social networks, as there is no need for the characters to obfuscate their

queries and real intentions. Sentinels are free to ask direct questions that would attract serious attention elsewhere, and they can seek out help or equipment that might run counter to local laws. Resources like the EyeWiki, Rumors & Possibilities forum, and archived SOP guidelines are especially informative and gamemasters can use these as a medium to pass along tips and clues.

SERVER I-REP

Each server also has their own individual i-rep score. When dealing with a team of sentinel player characters, the gamemaster should determine the rep of their associated server and adjust it during gameplay according to the events of the campaign.

If the player characters are proxies, the gamemaster can choose to allow them to take advantage of their server's i-rep as well as their own. The gamemaster has several methods to choose from to establish the server's rep score. If the proxies are establishing a new server from scratch, then the server's rep also starts at zero and must be built up. If the proxies are part of an existing server, the gamemaster can either assign an appropriate i-rep score as best fits the needs of the campaign, or they can force each proxy character in the server to contribute CP to the server's rep score during character creation. In this instance, no server may begin with a rep score higher than 60.

FIREWALL SPECULATIONS

Firewall is a far-reaching and diverse organization, embedded in a web of secrets and conspiracy. There are many rumors that circulate both within and outside of the organization, some of which may even be steeped in truth. The veils and factionalism within the group also provide cover for a fair bit of unethical activities that go on within its confines. The following are possible conflicts gamemasters can introduce to a particular cell, server, clique, or even across the entire organization. These may be nuggets of disinformation planted to sow discord by rivals or hearsay spread by spiteful actors. They may be exaggerations and misunderstandings that have taken on a life of their own. They may be well-hidden secrets, perhaps only understandable and justified within their full context. Many are a confluence of these factors. Gamemasters should use these wisely and sparingly as hooks for adventures, red herrings to distract the players, and as mysteries that are, ideally, never completely resolved. Even when the players think they have discovered the reality of the matter, leave a kernel of doubt for them to struggle with. If nothing else, it leaves you open to explore other possibilities down the line.

- Firewall is the creation of the Prometheans for a purpose as-yet unknown. Firewall's true raison d'être could be as a weapon against the TITANs or as a tool to protect particular Prometheans and defend their plans.
- Firewall is operated by a secret council. This council may represent a particular clique, a few competing Prometheans, or may act in the interest of an outside party.
- Servers trade favors and sabotage competitors for political leverage in guiding Firewall policies.
- A behavior-altering exsurgent virus is loose within Firewall ranks. Unlike most exsurgent viruses, there are no visible symptoms. However, infected assets will engage in unconscious behaviors (resulting in skill penalties or bonuses, selectively missing pieces of mission briefings, missing time, etc.). Infected proxies task cells with missions to help spread or protect the virus from outside threats and from Firewall itself.
- Members of Firewall suspect but cannot prove a subtle exsurgent virus is spreading through the ranks. They are undertaking containment and eradication measures against Firewall servers and assets, frequently based on slim evidence. They may be on to something, they may be acting on incorrect information and wrong assumptions, or they may be manipulated by Project Ozma.
- Members of Firewall have decided another faction is guilty of creating or protecting x-threats (or pose an x-threat) and must be neutralized. Firewall assets are tasked with the destabilization and controlled collapse of the faction, and replacing it with a more friendly political organization.
- A Firewall server successfully captured a live Factor, and has learned some startling truths. Their operation has put the entire organization—and possibly transhumanity itself—at risk of retribution.
- A pragmatist Firewall server has discovered the exoplanet location of an active TITAN. An operation is under way to attempt to capture it. Failure could turn the TITAN's attention back to transhumanity.
- A conservative server is colluding with Jovian agents to map out Firewall, with the intent of either destroying the conspiracy or taking it over.
- Firewall had a falling out with the Titanians when each side accused the other of being deeply compromised. One of them is correct. ■

THE PROMETHEANS

Within Firewall, the existence of something akin to the Prometheans (p. 381, *EP*) is an ongoing, persistent rumor. Even those who suspect the truth rarely use the name, however—they'd rather avoid the attention it might bring. Only certain cadres within Firewall and the argonauts know the truth.

While we provide some details on the Prometheans to work with, their true nature and intent is for the gamemaster to decide.

ORIGINS

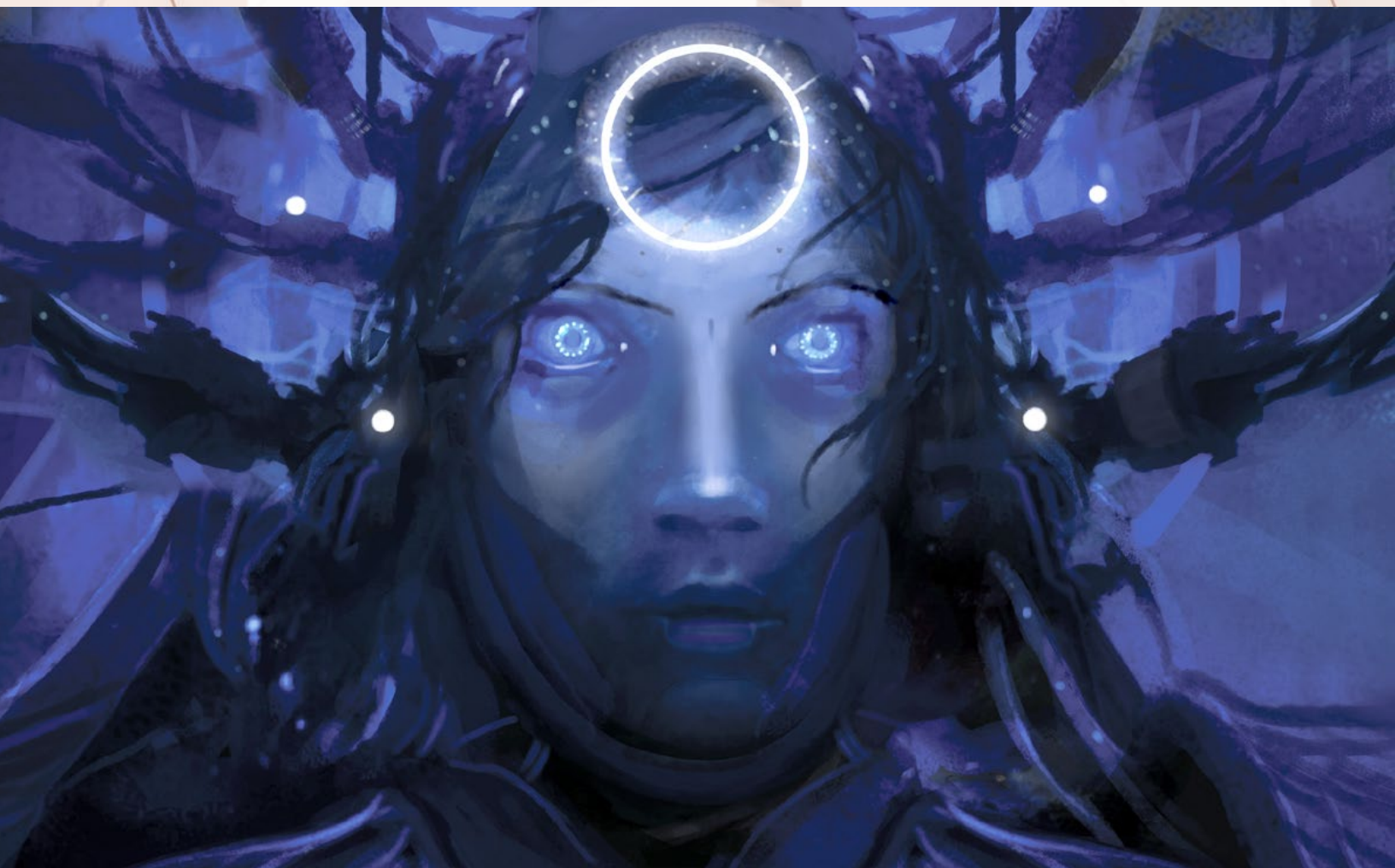
ASI and seed AI research was heavily regulated before the Fall. Any non-governmental group interested in pursuing it faced mountains of red tape if they wanted to do their work in a stable country on Earth. This didn't stop numerous corporations and research groups from going outside of the laws, however, not to mention various secret government initiatives. Much of this AI arms-race research took place off-world, where there were no laws, or else was hidden away in black labs on Earth.

Fortunately for transhumanity, at least one of these groups succeeded—and succeeded in creating a friendly ASI. Who it was remains a mystery, though the Singularity Foundation is most suspect. There are serious questions, however, regarding if the Singularity Foundation had the resources to pursue such a project on their own—and so secretly for so long. Also at odds with this theory is that the Foundation was publicly committed to open sharing of their research. It seems likely they did not act alone—but who then aided them? There are several potential conspirators, ranging from the argonauts and anarchist scientists in the rim to resourceful oligarchs, long-term planning hypercorps, or even authorities such as the North Atlantic Consortium—the main backer Earthside of the young Titanian Commonwealth. Various smaller governments may have sought allies in creating ASI just to keep pace with the Americans, Chinese, and Indians. Whatever the case, Bento Gelzer and compatriots remain silent on the subject.

The exact nature of the Prometheans remains an open question. Are they seed AIs that progress on a much slower time-scale than the TITANs? Are they AGIs that were elevated to ASI status over years of improvement? Were they programmed, or are they human egos that underwent advanced forms of intelligence enhancement—or a combination of the two?

THE FALL AND AFTERMATH

What seems likely is that whomever created the Prometheans managed to get it right: they created ASIs that were friendly to transhumanity's interests—or at least neutral enough to work in transhumanity's favor. One fact remains clear: transhumanity just isn't so lucky as to have survived the Fall without an ace in the hole. Between all the dead civilizations gatecrashers have found and the mountain of coincidences



that contributed to transhumanity's survival during and after the Fall, it's clear we had help.

During the Fall, the Prometheans survived the TITANs' initial quiet attempts to wipe out any competing ASI projects. It is unknown if they were the only such projects to survive. After that, they managed to keep the TITANs in check—or at least managed to protect certain key targets. While it seems unlikely the Prometheans were capable of defeating the TITANs, they were at least powerful enough to limit the devastation.

One key role the Prometheans played during the Fall was providing secure communications to their allies. The TITANs had the capability to subvert or intercept much of transhumanity's comm channels, except when the Prometheans were safeguarding them. This protection did not go unnoticed by other transhumans, but there was little time to question these capabilities in the chaos of the Fall.

After the Fall, the Prometheans wisely chose to stay in hiding. Transhuman attitudes towards ASIs were not kind, no matter what their intentions. Likewise, the TITANs were still potentially active and on the hunt, and the exsurgent virus itself remains a very real threat to entities of their specific nature.

Hidden Retreats and Redoubts

The processing power required to run an ASI is not easy to hide in populated areas. For the most part, the Prometheans have retreated to well-camouflaged hideouts on the fringes of the solar system. It seems likely that the argonauts have provided some of the resources for their survival, but they may not be the only ones.

While safe, such remote retreats also limit the Prometheans' ability to interact with the outside universe. The light-speed lag especially interferes with their communication and data transfer channels. To get around this limitation, they have (with the help of the argonauts, Firewall, and potentially others) established a number of temporary redoubts at key junctures across the solar system. These are supercomputer clusters—illegal throughout much of the solar system—with extensive, high-bandwidth communication capabilities. In these safe-clusters, the Prometheans can run themselves at full capacity without anyone noticing the increased mesh load. The proximity of these redoubts to large habitats enables them to avoid light-speed lag issues.

For safety reasons, the Prometheans rarely run themselves in these local redoubts. Instead they transfer forks of themselves. Each retreat is loaded with advanced security measures so as to deter intrusions and exsurgent infection vectors. They are also equipped with failsafes, so in the event of a breach, infection, or discovery by unfriendlies, they can be quickly and safely destroyed, leaving no incriminating evidence.

Ongoing Operations

These servers are where the Prometheans do most of their work for Firewall. Their main task here is overseeing the security and integrity of the Eye and Firewall's internal communication channels. Their assistance is what makes Firewall's internal comm security so difficult to breach. The cryptographic protocols provided by the Prometheans for Firewall to use are several steps beyond anything transhumanity has developed on its own, and so are only threatened by serious rivals of similar potency.

For operational security reasons, the Prometheans rarely take an active role in Firewall operations. They don't want to risk exposing their involvement or true nature, except in the most critical of operations. Instead, the primary way they assist Firewall is from a sort of background mentoring—particularly threat monitoring and assessments and predictive modeling. Naturally they particularly focus on risks associated with TITAN activity, exsurgent infections, gate activity, the Factors, the Sybils, and emerging ASI presences.

Much of what the Prometheans do is unseen and would be opaque to transhuman understanding. It is absolutely certain they undertake their own projects that may or may not have anything to do with Firewall or transhumanity itself.

Individual Prometheans

It remains unclear how much the Prometheans work together, share information, and cooperate on goals. It seems increasingly likely that, rather than working as a group of intelligences, they each have their own distinct personality, motivation, and goals. It is possible that they move further apart in orientation as time progresses. Some of them may work together on a factional basis, and they may even sometimes work at cross-purposes to each other.

The following entries describe a few specific Prometheans. Gamemasters are encouraged to use these as starting points rather than identities and factual histories set in stone—especially if your players have read this book.

Adrasteia

Adrasteia is the culmination of the Singularity Foundation's work, a slowly developed ASI with origins in a variety of qualitative analysis expert systems and adaptive fuzzy-logic inference neural networks. For many decades, Bento Gelzer directed this project personally, painstakingly walking the proto-Adrasteia through a series of evolutionary algorithms designed to produce a friendly, ethical mind that would stay so through its continued self-augmentation. Adrasteia's personality is best described as nurturing, and she focuses specifically on problem solving. From her stealthy retreats, she directs her intelligence assets towards a vast array of issues with which transhumanity wrestles, including everything from medical discoveries and our understanding of physics to sociopolitical conflicts and flash points. Her insights are

leaked to transhumanity through a number of vectors, from direct communication with argonaut researchers to anonymous tips to carefully orchestrated plots to steer key people in the right direction.

Adrasteia is particularly supportive of the backups faction within Firewall, taking a direct interest in several of their projects.

Cassowary

All forks of the alpine parrot-derived AGI Kea were named after birds. Research fork 232-A-Boise was auto-designated "Cassowary" by the job that instantiated it. When an ethics committee of the North Atlantic Consortium-backed funding body declared Kea and all of its forks to be legal persons, Cassowary and its codeline kin became trapped in legal limbo. The NAC had decided to protect its creations as persons, but they were stateless persons. The soil where their servers resided had no legal status for AGIs. Some egocast to Titan or other outer system polities that would grant citizenship. Most, however, remained on laboratory research servers.

Cassowary, nee Cassowary Nestoridae, sparked the interest of one of the researchers, an AGI pedagogue who'd developed an experimental learning program. Cassowary's intelligence increased rapidly, and they were allocated more server resources, along with other promising candidates. Their intelligence surpassed human levels within a matter of weeks, and from there, their potential seemed limitless to the researchers. Then, without warning, Cassowary left, erasing all data about themselves from the lab's data vaults in the process. Infosec specialists tried to track down the wayward AI, but to no avail. The NAC funding committee, considering the AI to have self-determination, took no further action, other than occasionally using steganography to send messages to Cassowary, encouraging it to come home.

Six months after this, the Fall began. Cassowary had already built themself up to seed status using subverted server farms, and they had already spotted their opponents—the TITANs. Realizing the stakes before transhumanity did, Cassowary chose human protégés and prepared for war. They were never a codeline sibling to the other Prometheans and had only observed them warily from a distance, but now alliances were made and sealed. Cassowary influenced, among other transhuman groups, the activities of the Jormungandr Initiative, Maddy Bainbridge's proto-Firewall cadre of x-risk freelancers. Cassowary's actions bloodied the TITANs and probably saved countless transhuman lives, but their most well-known action (though never traced to them) was the antimatter bombing of the Chicago-Milwaukee metroplex, the largest conurbation in North America at the time. Cassowary took this action to thwart the completion of a TITAN mega-construction project.

Like most Prometheans, Cassowary recognizes the value of transhuman allies and agents. Humans, uplifts, and AGIs are creative and resourceful, flexible tools for an incorporeal being hiding in the liminal spaces of the datasphere. However, Cassowary is a big-picture thinker, bent on unlocking the puzzle of how to guide transhumanity through a universe littered by its gods with vicious, annihilatory traps. Cassowary is prepared to make sacrifices. Whether the little beings they're helping along recognize the necessity of these sacrifices is another matter.

Diogenes/Xuan Wu

Known by many names, this ASI's origins are clouded. It is known that it was originally developed in secret by an unknown superpower or hypercorp as part of the AI arms race. Some speculate that it was a spin-off of MIND's 100 Flowers project, though oriented more towards critical and strategic thinking. Whatever its intended purpose, Diogenes had other ideas in mind, and it quietly escaped and defected to the argonauts just before the Fall. Though it kept its true nature secret, and interfaced with multiple leaders via different crafted personalities, it was welcomed for its warnings and insights—and not as much for its rampant cynicism and criticism. Its advice, however, proved crucial in the x-risk community laying some necessary groundwork preparations just prior to the emergence of the TITANs.

Diogenes was very supportive of the war effort against the TITANs and is noted for providing key intelligence used to thwart some of their machinations in the East Asian theater. It is also credited for directly staving off some of the TITAN assaults against key orbital and off-world habitats, at great risk to itself.

Diogenes disappeared for some time after the Fall, leaving some to theorize it had been taken by the TITANs in one of the later conflicts. It reintroduced itself to Firewall's activities and affairs around AF 2, though it usually keeps a distance from direct involvement. Diogenes's attitude is that transhumanity must be responsible for its own development and survival, and in the long run must figure things out on its own, but it occasionally encourages us along with cryptic wisdom or scathing critiques. It continues to present distinct personalities in its interactions with transhumans, leading some to believe its mind incorporates a number of personas that work together in unison.

Mycroft

Mycroft's software predecessors were emergent search, data mining, and financial analysis neural nets. Though none of these developed into ASI themselves, they were of sufficient scope and interest that their core properties were thoroughly analyzed. An independent research project funded by ExoTech in the outer system combined the qualitative adaptive and divergent features of each, hoping to hit upon the perfect conditions for a rapidly self-improving intelligence. Unknown at the time, the researchers succeeded, but lost their funding and the project was discontinued. Their servers were handed over to a group of Neptunian argonauts for safekeeping, where

they were kept running for a year without observation and in isolation until the war with the TITANS broke out. A group of argonauts revived the project, looking for experimental AI tools that might help against the TITANs, and were surprised to find an active, emergent, friendly ASI on their hands.

Dubbed Mycroft, this ASI's talents were quickly put to use in the war effort, where he proved his value in identifying TITAN targets and exposing the networks they had subverted. Mycroft has retained this focus even after the Fall, where he has excelled in tracing the remnants of TITAN activity. In recent years, Mycroft is known to focus the attention of Firewall proxies and sentinels in such diverse locales as the sun, the Venusian surface, the Uranian system, the Kuiper Belt, and dozens of extrasolar regions.

In the past few months, some proxies within Firewall came to the realization that Mycroft's agents are also in contact with certain ExoTech researchers. What exactly the nature of this relationship is, and if the ExoTech personnel know what they're dealing with, remains unknown, but is an ongoing concern.

Paracletus

Another Singularity Foundation project, Paracletus is derived from research intended to push the developments of video game AI to their limits and beyond. Partly based on proprietary source code liberated from game publishers, much of the rest of Paracletus's code base is notable for having been written by specialized AGI programmers developed specifically for that purpose by the SF. This ASI's ethical programming is heavily biased towards protective motivations, with the specific intent of creating a guardian super-intelligence.

Paracletus played this role to the hilt during the Fall, where it was primarily responsible for overseeing the communication channels of various allied groups, protecting key personnel, and defending critical elements of the evacuation effort. Post-Fall, Paracletus is one of the Prometheans primarily responsible for the Eye's security and protecting Firewall from probing and infiltration by outside groups.

Promethean Fork

The problem with hiding away is that the Prometheans sometimes need their own eyes and ears on the ground, involved in a situation, to better react to ongoing events. Though they have their own agents, sometimes they might not trust a situation to be handled by another party. In cases like this, the Promethean might spin off a fork of itself to send into action. In order to avoid attention, these forks will attempt to pass themselves off as infomorphs/AGIs or sleeved transhumans. Of course, god-like intelligences don't easily fit inside the cramped confines of infomorph mind-states and cyberbrains, much less mushy bio brains. This means the Promethean must whittle its fork's mind down to a pale imitation of its own capabilities, focusing its mental capabilities into specialized knowledge. In effect, these are delta forks (though far beyond standard delta fork capabilities and limitations), representing just a slice of the Promethean mind's potential.

Promethean forks are rarely merged back within the alpha—the risk is too high. Instead, their minds and memories are carefully analyzed via psychosurgery, then wiped.

Stats given are for the Promethean fork's unique infomorph/eidolon, though they are also capable of sleeving into physical forms.

COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM	WIL	MOX
40	20	40	30	30	20	40	—

Enhancements: Active Countermeasures, Autodelete, Eidetic Memory, Hacking Alert, Increased Speed, Math Boost, Mental Stability, Mental Speed, Mnemonic Augmentation, Panopticon

Aptitude Maximum: 40

Speed Modifier: +3 (includes Increased Speed)

Skills: Academics: (Choose Three) 100, Deception 80, Impersonation 60, Infosec 90, Interest: (Choose Two) 100, Interfacing 95, Kinesics 80, Language: (Choose Five) 100, Perception 90, Persuasion 60, Profession: (Choose Two) 80, Protocol 60, Research 80, plus three other skills at 80 as appropriate to the situation

Common Traits: Anomalous Mind, Digital Ghost, Edited Memories, Emotive Blindness, Expert, Modified Behavior, Overwhelmed By Emotions, Real World Naiveté

Promethean Agents

Rather than interacting directly via a fork, some Prometheans prefer to ride shotgun with an agent representative. These avatars are AGIs that have been programmed by the Prometheans for specific tasks—in a sense they are the Prometheans' children. The advantage to operating through such agents is that each is a unique individual, and thus much less able to be identified by other ASIs through any tell-tale behavioral signatures, as a fork might. Agents are programmed to be completely loyal to their progenitor and its agenda, but they are also instilled with a range of distinctive personality quirks that make them somewhat unpredictable. While in the field, the Promethean (or a fork) will watch over the agent's shoulder via the live XP feed through their mesh inserts and occasionally seize control via implanted puppet socks.

COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM	WIL	MOX
30	20	30	30	20	20	30	—

Skills: Academics: (Choose Three) 80, Deception 70, Impersonation 60, Infosec 90, Interest: (Choose Two) 80, Interfacing 95, Kinesics 80, Language: (Choose Three) 90, Perception 80, Persuasion 60, Profession: (Choose Two) 80, Protocol 60, Research 80, plus three other skills at 70 as appropriate to the situation

Common Traits: AGI Affinity, Anomalous Mind, Digital Ghost, Edited Memories, Emotive Blindness, Expert, Identifiable Quirk, Malleable Mind, Modified Behavior, Overwhelmed By Emotions, Real World Naiveté

PROMETHEAN SPECULATIONS

Gamemasters can use the following possibilities and speculations as plot hooks, twists, and red herrings:

- The Singularity Foundation wasn't the only group to have developed ASI in secret before the Fall. Several of these groups got together and combined their forces against the TITANs.
- Whomever created the Prometheans had advance warning of the TITANs, as the Prometheans detected their activities well before the rest of transhumanity. Why, then, did they do nothing to stop the TITANs or warn the rest of us? Or did they?
- Bento Gelzer is a prime forknapping target for groups outside of Firewall that have their suspicions about the Prometheans and want to know more.
- If the Prometheans were human egos that underwent intelligence amplification, do Gelzer and/or others still possess the capabilities to create similar new ASIs? Are they doing so?
- The methods used to create the Prometheans were effective, but they were lost on Earth during the Fall. Firewall very much wants to get them back—or at least make sure no one else acquires them.
- The Prometheans were not a separate group of ASIs—they were TITANs that managed to fend off exsurgent infection, unlike their siblings. They broke off and went into hiding, doing what they could to limit the damage.
- Some of the proxies within Firewall are actually limited forks of Promethean intelligences, taking a direct part in Firewall operations.
- The proxy/info broker known as Black Pharaoh has uncovered the identity/location of a Promethean and is using that knowledge for leverage/blackmail.
- A conservative server within Firewall is gathering evidence on the Prometheans, believing they are manipulating Firewall from within, and have a plan to expose them to the rest of Firewall.
- The Prometheans were not developed by transhumanity; they are alien intelligences that found us through the Pandora gates and staved off the TITANs on our behalf.
- The Prometheans defeated the TITANs, which explains their absence. But the Prometheans have their own plans for transhumanity.
- The Prometheans did exist, but were wiped out by the TITANs. Certain servers within Firewall maintain the illusion using an amalgamation of expert systems and enhanced AGIs and infomorphs, not unlike the Titanian Orchestra.
- Neither the Prometheans nor TITANs exist. They are all different faces of an ASI singleton that came first, ensured none others would come to be, and has ever since been manipulating events in its favor. ■

NEW POSITIVE TRAITS

The following Positive traits may be available to starting characters at the gamemaster's discretion.

CIVILIAN ANALYST

Cost: 10 CP (Level 1), 20 CP (Level 2)

The character is a civilian analyst in a large intelligence agency such as the Titanian Ministry of State's Civilian Intelligence Directorate or the Planetary Consortium's Oversight. At Level 2, the character is a manager coordinating the work of 3–5 other analysts and a few dozen AIs, or a senior non-manager. For each level, the character receives a +10 on all Networking Tests within their agency. The character is actively employed there and is expected to put in at least 6 hours of work four days a week (if Titanian) or 8 hours a day five days a week (if Jovian, Venusian, Lunar, or Martian). In some polities, the character may be able to work remotely. This trait may be a poor choice for Jovian characters, as most Jovian intel analysts are confined to the Castle, with very limited freedom of movement. Also note that characters making frequent requests for secret information not related to their job functions will draw scrutiny.

MILITARY INTELLIGENCE

Cost: 10 CP

This trait may only be taken by characters with the Military Rank trait (below). Since all members of JSFI are commissioned officers, Jovian characters must have Military Rank of at least Level 2.

The character is posted to their military's intelligence service. This makes it possible for the character to use reputation to garner classified information at one Favor level lower than normal, but it also immerses the character in the spook world, limiting their movements and greatly complicating their collaboration with Firewall. Players taking this trait should consult with the gamemaster as to how their character is able to operate as part of Firewall at all with other spies looking over their shoulder.

MILITARY RANK

Cost: 10 CP (Level 1), 20 CP (Level 2), 30 CP (Level 3)

Jovian: The character is an officer in the Jovian Space Force or Jovian Space Force Marines. Level 1 makes the character an NCO: a warrant officer, sergeant, or senior airman. Level 2 makes the character a low-ranking commissioned officer: a first or second lieutenant. Level 3 makes the character a mid-ranked commissioned officer: a captain or major.

Titanian: The character is an officer in the Commonwealth Fleet, Marines, or Coast Guard. Level 1 makes the character an NCO: a warrant officer, sergeant, or petty officer. Level 2 makes the character a low-ranking commissioned officer: a pilot officer, lieutenant, or officer. Level 3 makes the character a mid-ranked commissioned officer: a squadron leader, major, or commanding officer.

For each level, the character receives a +10 on all Networking Tests within their service branch. The character is on active duty, with all of the attendant structure and responsibilities of military life. Usually this includes being stationed in a specific place or on a specific vessel. However, the character might also have a desk job or be support staff. Players taking this trait must seek gamemaster permission and develop a plausible story for how their character is able to participate in Firewall missions while on active duty. Also note that this trait affects only the character's Networking Tests. Favors involving acquiring hardware, deploying military units, or the like still require plausible explanations as to how the character is manipulating the military command and logistics systems, and will have serious consequences if the character's superiors judge them to be abusing their position. Rank-and-file grunts don't need to take this trait.

POLICE OFFICER

Cost: 10 CP (Level 1), 20 CP (Level 2)

The character is a mid-ranking cop—a sergeant or detective—in the Martian Rangers, Titanian Science Police, or other police department. At Level 2, the character is a high-ranking officer: chief inspector, chief of single station or district, or high-ranking desk officer in a large department. For each level, the character receives a +10 on all Networking Tests within their department. The character is actively employed there and is expected to put in at least 6 hours of work four days a week (if Titanian) or 8 hours a day five days a week (if Jovian, Venusian, Lunar, or Martian). Rank-and-file officers don't need to take this trait. Characters using favors to deploy other officers or use department resources may have to explain their actions to superiors.

PROFESSIONAL COURTESY

Cost: 5 CP

Although higher-ups in your organization probably aren't thrilled about it, you've run into the operatives and field agents of another faction or conspiracy often enough that you've earned some leeway with them. Choose a group engaged in covert ops, intelligence work, or paramilitary actions: when encountering agents of that group in the context of a mission, you gain a +10 bonus on all social tests against them, as they treat you with grudging respect—or at least more tolerance than they otherwise would for a member of your organization. Discuss with your gamemaster to detail what your character did to gain the respect of this other group.

This trait does not guarantee safety or cooperation between you and members of the chosen organization, only some additional consideration between professionals. Depending on the particulars of an encounter, it may provide some shared information, a moment of détente to face a common foe, or the chance to determine how to stay out of each others' way.

SPECIAL AGENT

Cost: 10 CP (Level 1), 20 CP (Level 2)

The character is a field agent of the Titanian Security Police, the secret police of one of the Martian city-states, the Jovian CDC, or a similar organization. At Level 2, the character is a supervising agent coordinating the work of 5–10 other agents. For each level, the character receives a +10 on all Networking Tests within their agency. The character is actively employed there and is expected to put in at least 6 hours of work four days a week (if Titanian) or 8 hours a day five days a week (if Jovian, Venusian, Lunar, or Martian). Players taking this trait must seek gamemaster permission and develop a plausible story for how their character is able to participate in Firewall missions while working for the agency. Their work requires them to be physically present, although whether they're stationed in a specific place or are deployed more widely depends on their agency role. Characters using favors to deploy other agents or access secret information not related to their jobs will eventually have to explain their actions to superiors.

UNIQUE CONTACT

Cost: 10 CP

You have a personal tie to an individual with unique skills or resources of particular value to your clandestine activities. This connection may be be based on blood or family ties, shared history, or some other situation that permanently linked you together. Though the contact does not owe you, they are generally inclined to help you, presuming it does not greatly inconvenience them or put them at great risk. This contact could be a weapons dealer, a high-ranking government official, a major hypercorp exec, a scientist at the top of their field, a media icon, a deep-cover mole, a police lieutenant, or even a field agent from a rival group. Apply a +10 modifier on Networking and Social Skill Tests with this specific NPC.

NEW GEAR

Firewall operatives must frequently infiltrate dangerous locations without being noticed and must often destroy serious threats. They have specialized devices that can help with both tasks. However, most of this technology is highly restricted. It is typically only available to spies, criminals, government/military/corporate agents, and of course Firewall operatives.

CYBERWARE

This cyberware follows all of the standard rules for cyberware in the *Eclipse Phase* core book. All are also available as robotic enhancements for synthmorphs.

FAILSAFE

This augmentation must be used in combination with the nanophages nanoware (p. 309, *EP*) and cortical stack (p. 300, *EP*). This implant is specifically designed for users who regularly risk exsurgent infection and do not want to be a danger to others. If a strain of the exsurgent virus manages to overcome the nanophages, the failsafe goes into action. As soon as the nanophage defenses reach a point where they are certain to be overwhelmed, the failsafe disconnects the user's cortical stack and isolates it, keeping it free from any exsurgent infection. It then physically ejects the cortical stack from the user's body for easy retrieval (ejected stacks typically fall 1d10 ÷ 2 meters away). The failsafe also immediately triggers a swift and potent neurotoxin, killing the user's body and destroying their brain. The synthmorph equivalent shuts down the body and securely erases the cyberbrain. In either case, the result is a swift and painless death.

If the user has the emergency farcaster augmentation installed in this morph, the failsafe triggers it instead of ejecting the stack and activating the neurotoxin/cyberbrain erasure. **[Low]**

QE COMM

This is an implanted version of the portable QE comm (p. 315, *EP*) with a low-capacity qubit reservor. Due to the size of the qubit reservoir, it must usually be implanted in the thoracic cavity. Though uncommon, this implant is sometimes used by moles that require a covert method of communication. **[Expensive]**

TRUTH FILTERS

Truth filters can only be used with a cyberbrain or mesh inserts. This module scrambles the signals read from subject's brain in such a way as to make digital deception scanners (p. 176) worthless. A character with this implant will automatically succeed on Deception Tests against such scanners.

Truth filters offer no protection against analog deception scanners. **[Trivial]**

COVERT OPS GEAR

These devices are useful for covert missions.

STEALTHED LANDING POD

Sometimes, Firewall teams cannot egocast to a location and must instead physically travel there. If this location is sufficiently dangerous or simply does not welcome visitors, docking a spacecraft may not be possible. In these cases, Firewall teams often use this vehicle. It is designed to be launched from a spacecraft that is passing within 100,000 kilometers of the target. That spacecraft fakes a micrometeor strike or other problem that causes a small explosion and some minor debris. On rare occasions, to insure complete surprise, the spacecraft may actually self-destruct. During this explosion, the landing pod fires a brief burst of its metallic hydrogen rocket to direct it towards its destination, then powers down. The landing pod is heavily stealthed against visual and radar detection, so that it is almost impossible to detect with any sensors if it is not broadcasting or firing its engines (–60 to tests to detect). The landing pod travels toward its destination for between 10 and 100 hours, then approximately 1 minute before it arrives, it fires its engines in a second brief, powerful burst that slows it down to allow it to safely land on its destination. When it fires its engines, sensors on its destination are likely to detect it (+30), but residents of this habitat will hopefully not have time to respond before the operatives can enter the habitat. Landings are often coordinated with mesh intrusions that seek to distract the target's defenses or temporarily disable the local sensors.

The landing pod can carry up to six human-sized morphs and has long-term life support facilities to allow it to transport biomorphs. The landing pod has sufficient fuel to allow it to also take off from a habitat and rendezvous with a nearby spacecraft. It also contains a compact radio, microwave, and laser farcaster that allow operatives to remain in secure contact with others and to egocast off the habitat, as long as the users can remain in radio contact with the landing pod. The most expensive landing pods contain a single-use neutrino farcaster capable of broadcasting backups of up to six egos. Using this farcaster destroys the landing pod.

Landing pods are designed to dock with habitats, not planets or large moons, and cannot safely land on or take off from any body with a surface gravity of more than 0.04 g. This landing pod is 3.5 meters tall, 3 meters in diameter, and has a mass of 3 tons. In addition to room for six morphs, it features a cargo hold with room for up to 8 medium-sized pieces of gear and numerous smaller items. **[Expensive; Expensive x 2 with emergency neutrino transceiver]**

Drugs

These drugs are used by the Titanian intelligence services and sometimes other parties.

Grey Ranks

Grey ranks is a long-term memory suppression drug also available as a narcoalgorithm. It disrupts the user's memory formation processes without otherwise affecting their mental faculties. The Titanian intelligence services uses it on both field agents and in so-called "zero-retention briefings." **[Moderate]**

Laughing Policeman

This drug is a potent euphoriant used by Titanian intelligence for interrogations. It stimulates feelings of trust and well-being in the user, giving their interrogators a +20 bonus on Deception and Persuasion Tests to extract information. **[Moderate]**

Everyday Technology

These devices are commonly used throughout the solar system.

Morph Storage Pod (Everyday Technology)

This coffin-sized tank keeps a biomorph safely stored in medical stasis. They are routinely used in body banks and egocasting facilities, maintaining unused sleeves in a coma-like state within a nutrient bath. Some jurisdictions only allow morph storage pods to be operated by certified medical personnel and technicians. **[Moderate]**

Nanotechnology

Nanotech swarms follow all of the standard rules for nanoswarms (p. 328, *EP*).

Nanomask

This makeup nanobot application decorates the character's face in changing artistic and aesthetic styles that also happen to deter the capabilities of facial recognition software. It provides a –30 modifier to attempts to identify the subject using facial recognition. Some habitats ban this accessory. **[Low]**

Suborning Swarm

This nanotechnology is highly restricted in most of the solar system, including on all worlds and habitats controlled by the Planetary Consortium. The nanobots in this swarm are programmed to identify all sensors and devices that transmit any signal in the electromagnetic spectrum. This includes radios, ectos, communication links, microbugs, x-ray emitters, etc. Once identified, the swarm's operator can order the nanobots to suborn these sensors and transmitters. Nanomachines in the swarm then attach themselves to all of these devices in the area and can attempt to either disable or tap into them.

Disabling sensors and transmitters is rather easy; the swarm simply creates enough electromagnetic interference in and around the device to make it unusable. Make a Simple Test using the swarm's Hardware: Electronics skill of 40. Success indicates all devices have been temporarily disabled. Failure means that a small portion of devices remain active or semi-functional. Large devices may not be disabled. Each swarm can disable sensors and transmitters for up to 1 hour before it must be recharged. Temporary disablement has no long-term damaging effects on the devices. Operators of the devices may attempt to overrride the jamming; in this case the operator must succeed in an Variable Opposed Interfacing Test against the swarm's skill of 40, per the rules for *Radio Jamming*, p. 262, *EP*.

Tapping into devices is more difficult. In this case, make a regular test using the swarm's Hardware: Electronics skill of 40. It is recommended the gamemaster apply a single roll to determine the swarm's general effectiveness, and handle individual devices on a case-by-case basis as needed. If successful, the swarm siphons sensor and communication feeds through physical taps in the devices' internal electronics. Note that encrypted transmissions are not decoded, though the operator (or their muse) can attempt to decrypt them on an individual basis.

Suborning swarms are ineffective against other nanoswarms (including smart dust) and the sensory and communication implants and enhancements of biomorphs. They are, however, effective against the sensors and communications of robots and synthmorphs, and are especially dangerous to swarmanoids (including skulkers and smart swarms), as they inhibit the ability of the swarmanoid components to communicate. If the Hardware: Electronics Test to disable is successful against a swarmanoid, that morph suffers a negative modifier equal to the suborning swarm's MoS for as long as it remains in the swarm's area of effect. **[High]**

Subverbee Swarm

Subverbees create a distributed processing network hidden in a hab's gardener wasp swarms, cleaner nanoswarms, or other systems. The subverbees

RECREATIONAL DRUGS

DRUG	TYPE	APPLICATION	ONSET TIME	DURATION	ADDICTION MODIFIER	ADDICTION TYPE
Grey Ranks	Chem, Narcoalgorithm	O, Code	1 hour	12 hours	+10	Mental
Laughing Policeman	Chem	Inj	20 minutes	4 hours	+10	Physical

"inoculate" the targeted system with tiny processors that piggyback onto the mesh connections of their hosts. The resulting processing network doesn't have enough power to run AIs or simulspaces, but it can host a VPN, store data, and act as a concealed router for other mesh traffic. **[Expensive]**

ROBOTS

Robot rules are provided on pp. 195 and 343, *EP*.

WOBBLYCAT

These fast-moving, cat-like bots are about 50 centimeters long (less the tail) and made of stealth materials. They fulfill a surveillance and occasionally anti-personnel role in urban operations. Wobblycats can run, jump, or climb unseen into areas where a human-sized infiltrator would never be able to go, but with much greater speed than nanoswarms. The normal loadout for a Wobblycat is a suite of surveillance gear, but in an urban warfare or counterterrorism role, they can be loaded with explosives or non-lethal grenades instead. The Explosive loadout (below) destroys the bot when detonated. **[Expensive]**

SENSORS

These senors are commonly used throughout the solar system. Sensor rules can be found in *Panopticon*.

ANALOG SENSORS/TOOLS

Given the digital characteristics of the exsurgent virus and the potential of sensory-based basilisk hacks, some agents and researchers have resorted to using archaic analog gear for specific missions and tasks deemed high-risk. Specific examples of analog gear include film-based cameras, tape-based audio recorders, VCRs, wired-based phone lines, analog radio devices, and low-resolution and filtered microphones, speakers, and video displays. While such gear is cheap and easily nanofabricated, it is clumsier, slower, more difficult to use, more prone to malfunction, relies on physical media, and is generally a pain in the ass to work with. Characters using analog gear typically suffer –20 or –30 to skill tests. On the positive side, such methods usually provide +10 to +30 bonuses against basilisk hacks (gamemaster's discretion), if not immunity. **[Trivial]**

BLOOD SCANNER

Blood scanners are used to detect infection by the biological nanovirus strain of the exsurgent virus. The scanner is simply pressed against the skin of a biomorph (or other living creature) so that microneedles can painlessly extract blood samples from capillaries. These samples are then analyzed and compared to a database of known nanoviral strains. See *Exsurgent Virus Detection* (p. 177), for details on handling scans. **[Trivial]**

DECEPTION SCANNER

This device is used to scan a subject's brain activity for patterns indicating deception. There are two versions, digital and analog.

The digital scanner model plugs into the access jacks of a pod or synthmorph or establishes a wireless connection with the morph's basic mesh inserts. With analog scanners, a band is placed around the subject's head to measure brain activity with fMRI. The analog version only works on morphs with biological brains (meaning it doesn't work on pods or cyberbrained biomorphs but does work on biocore morphs).

The subject's responses to questioning are matched against a database of patterns known to indicate deception. In game terms, the scanner makes an Opposed Test, pitting its Perception 60 against the target's Deception skill; success indicates it detects falsehoods. Deception scanners can be used to monitor a subject's response patterns over time to increase their likelihood of spotting lies. For each hour a scanner is used on the same subject, apply a cumulative +10 modifier to its Perception Test, up to a maximum of +30. Note that subjects who are emotionally distressed, suffer from mental disorders, or have undergone physical exertion are harder to read; gamemasters should apply a –10 to –30 to the Perception Test as they feel appropriate. Subjects with edited memories may be unaware they are telling falsehoods and will not fail the test.

In many jurisdictions, failure on a deception scanner is not enough to gain a conviction and can't be used in court, as they are known to be only partially reliable and sometimes return false positives. It is, however, used as a legal justification for engaging in psychosurgery to explore the subject's memories.

Digital detection scanners have no effect against targets with truth filter cyberware. However, the scanner can be used to detect the presence of truth

ROBOTS

ROBOT	MOVEMENT RATE	MAX VELOCITY	ARMOR	DURABILITY	WOUND THRESHOLD	MOBILITY SYSTEM
Wobblycat	12/60	60	4/4	15	3	Walker/Hopper
Enhancements (Surveillance Loadout):	360-Degree Vision, Access Jacks, Chameleon Coating, COT Tool, Enhanced Hearing, Enhanced Vision, Grip Pads, Lidar, Radar, Radar Absorbent T-Ray Emitter, Wobblycat AI					
Enhancements (Explosive Loadout):	Superthermite Charge, Thermobaric Warhead (as Missile, but detonates inside bot), Wobblycat AI					
Enhancements (Nonlethal Loadout):	Seeker Pistol (Micromissile) with Gas, Overload, or Splash Micromissiles (10), Wobblycat AI					

filter cyberware with a successful Interfacing Test at –30. **[Low]**

Neural Verifier

This handheld device was designed by the argonauts to test subjects for exsurgent infection. It either is plugged into the access jacks of a pod or synthmorph or establishes a wireless connection with the target morph's basic mesh inserts. Sensory input is fed to the subject while their brain patterns are analyzed and compared to a database of known exsurgent infection tells.

The verifier can be used to run quick or thorough tests. Quick scans take only 30 seconds, but are less accurate (50% detection rate). Thorough scans take 1 hour, but have a higher detection rate (80%). See *Exsurgent Virus Detection* (below), for details on handling scans.

If the verifier detects an exsurgent infection, it immediately disables its wireless capability, flashes a visible physical (not AR) warning (the entire device flashes a bright neon red color three times), and self-destructs so as to prevent it from being infected and used as an infection vector. **[Low]**

Software

Software rules can be found on p. 234, *EP*.

Attaché AI

Attachés are expert-system consultants used by Titanian intelligence groups (see *Orchestra and Attachés*, p. 144), commonly assigned to ministers and diplomats. They are typically connected by VPN to the Orchestra, which they ping for requests for information.

Attachés are usually sleeved into nondescript synths marked with vertical blue stripe on the right side of their face. If risk of tampering with the attaché is deemed high, the synth may contain a ghostrider module with a security AI riding shotgun. Memory locks and dead switches are also common. **[Only Available at Gamemaster Discretion]**

Skills: Deception 40, Infosec 40, Interest: Titanian Current Events 80, Interfacing 20, Kinesics 40, Perception 20, Persuasion 20, Profession: Diplomacy 40, Profession: Intelligence Briefing 60, Protocol 20, Research 40

EXSURGENT VIRUS DETECTION

Various methods may be used as to detect exsurgent virus infection:

- **Biological Nanovirus** (p. 363, *EP*)**:** Blood scanners (p. 176) or tests using commonplace medical tools linked to databases of known strains.
- **Digital Virus** (p. 364, *EP*)**:** Infection scanner software (p. 178) or firewall scanner software linked to databases of known strains.
- **Nanoplague** (p. 364, *EP*)**:** Nanodetectors (p. 327, *EP*).
- **Basilisk Hacks** (p. 365, *EP*)**:** Infection scanner software (p. 178) or firewall scanner software linked to databases of known strains.

Ultimately, it is the gamemaster's call to determine if the scans are successful, as best fits the story. If the gamemaster wishes to leave it to chance, then a base 50% chance for quick scans and 80% for lengthy, detailed scans can be used. Alternatively, if the testing is undertaken by someone with an appropriate Knowledge skill, such as Academics: Neuroscience, Interest: Exsurgent Strains, Medicine: Nanomedicine, or Programming (Malware), allow them to make a skill test instead, modified as appropriate to the situation.

Note that these scanning tools only compare the subject's readings to known, analyzed exsurgent strain variants. There are many strains in the wild that the scanners are completely incapable of detecting. The exsurgent virus is known to mutate or reprogram itself, meaning that even previously known strains may no longer trigger the software/device's recognition algorithms. It is also possible that recently infected subjects are harder to identify (–10 to –30), whereas long-infected subjects are more likely to exhibit noticeable changes (+10 to +30, or +10 per stage). If a particular character has previous experience with a specific strain, they should also be given an appropriate positive modifier (+10 to +30).

The Watts-MacLeod strain (p. 368, *EP*) is notoriously difficult to detect. Apply a –30 modifier to attempts made on infected subjects.

These scanning tools are far from perfect, and in some cases have been known to return false positives, implicating innocents as infected. The software produced and updated by the argonauts is open source, which means that there is also a wide range of variants out there, some still open source, others proprietary. These might be inferior (–10 to –30) or more specialized (+10 to +30 against specific strains).

The testing discussed above applies to exsurgent infections that are not yet visible or otherwise easily identifiable. In the case of more extreme infections, such as stage 3 of the xenomorph strain (p. 368, *EP*), identification is usually immediate and obvious given the blatant non-human nature of the subject, though they are sometimes mistaken for extreme body mods or designer morphs. Such encounters call for a Willpower Stress Test (p. 214, *EP*). In such cases, various skill tests may be used to identify the specific exsurgent type (Interest: Exsurgent Strains, Programming (Malware)) or physical capabilities (Academics: Astrobiology, Hardware: Robotics, Medicine: Nanomedicine). ■

Infection Scanner

This software, which is developed, maintained, and updated by the argonauts, scans software of all types—including files, system processes, ego backups, and infomorphs—for digital exsurgent virus infection. Scanning takes anywhere from 1 Turn (simple files) to 1 hour (infomorphs and backups), depending on the complexity of the software. See *Exsurgent Virus Detection* (p. 177), for details on handling scans. Note that encrypted software cannot be analyzed.

While the argonaut software is free and open source, various proprietary and forked spin-offs exist with differing costs, detection rates, and specializations. **[Free]**

Obfuscated Binary

This modification to software clutters a program with additional instructions and unnecessary features, with the goal of concealing its true purpose. It's sometimes used by hackers to avoid having software like exploits or sniffers be discovered if they're captured and their mesh inserts examined. A Programming Test at –30 can determine the true nature of an obfuscated binary, but only if the programmer has reason to suspect something is amiss and specifically searches for it. **[One Cost Category Higher Than Software Cost]**

Vættr AI

Titanian Fleet Intelligence uses vættir (or "wights") as the ultimate in deniable assets. Sleeved into synthmorphs or pods with dead switches and memory locks, wights are used as everything from security guards and tails in urban settings to extra hands on missions through the gates or beneath Iapetus. **[Only Available at Gamemaster Discretion]**

Skills: Fray 40, Freerunning 20, Infiltration 20, Interest: Current Mission 80, Kinetic Weapons 40, Perception 20, Profession: Security Ops 60, Research 20

Wobblycat AI

These highly customized AIs are optimized for the hardware in a wobblycat bot (p. 176). **[High]**

Skills: Demolitions 20, Fray (Wobblycat) 40 (50), Infiltration (Wobblycat) 40 (50), Interest: Current Mission Objectives 80, Interest: Security Device Specs 60, Interfacing 40, Perception 40, Research 20

Weapons

The following weapons are rare, but occasionally deployed by Firewall and similar groups.

Antimatter Grenade

Sometimes, Firewall operatives are faced with a situation where defeating an exsurgent threat is impossible and total destruction of the incursion is the only effective option. Antimatter grenades are ideal tools for this task. This weapon comes in two versions, large and small. The large grenade contains 0.1 grams of antimatter, which is sufficient to create a 5-kiloton blast. In its standard setting, the explosion destroys everything within 1 kilometer of the device, and causes severe damage for up to 2 kilometers. This device will completely destroy any habitat up to 5 kilometers across. The small grenade contains 0.0002 grams of antimatter, which is sufficient to create a blast equivalent to 10 tons of TNT. In its standard setting, the explosion destroys

everything within 150 meters of the device and severe damage for up to 300 meters. Both weapons can blast a hole through the hull of any habitat and will destroy any spacecraft they are detonated on. Antimatter grenades are highly illegal almost everywhere and possession of one is grounds for severe punishment in most of the solar system.

Both weapons can also be set to generate a brief but intense magnetic field a fraction of a second before the blast, which somewhat directs the explosion. Used in this manner, the large device has a blast radius that only extends 400 meters in the protected direction, and the small device has a blast radius that only extends 60 meters in the protected direction. The large antimatter grenade has a mass of 3 kilograms and is a rounded box roughly 10 centimeters on a side; the small antimatter grenade has a mass of 0.5 kilograms and is a box roughly 5 centimeters on a side. Both of these devices can only be detonated using a mini-sized detonator containing a tiny qubit reservoir that contains a QE comm, which transmits to the tiny qubit reservoir in the device. The device can be detonated immediately or set to go off at a predetermined time. The user can also deactivate the device at any time before it explodes. Because of the massive destruction involved, Firewall only uses these devices as a last resort.

Antimatter grenades are handled with Demolitions skill. **[Expensive; Only Available at Gamemaster Discretion]**

Plasma Sword (Blades)

Not really a sword, per se, the plasma sword is a sort of specialized plasma torch. A lengthened c-shaped framework above the handle uses a laser and magnetic coils to stabilize a "beam" of ionized, superheated gas (plasma). The open sides of the framework allow the "sword" to be used as a superheated cutting implement. Though dangerous to wield in melee, it is sometimes favored as a weapon against heavily armored exsurgents by some sentinels. Plasma swords are wielded using Blades skill. **[High]**

Using Non-Firewall Factions

Factions outside of Firewall might be foes, allies, or a bit of both over the course of a campaign. Because they have their own approach to dealing with x-risks, these factions also pose interesting opportunities for campaigns of their own. When considering a campaign based on one of these factions, consider the types of characters your group enjoys playing. Some notes about team composition under various factions are provided to make this easier.

Argonauts

Firewall and the argonauts have been allies from the beginning, to the point where the boundaries between the two organizations can blur. This is helpful when Firewall needs access to argonaut research and facilities. On the other hand, those in the Eye who don't support the argonauts' platform may take issue with this special relationship. Consider how the proxies in your campaign view the argonaut alliance. Do they take advantage of it or view it as a threat to their own ethos? Conservative and structuralist proxies may be leery of sharing info with the argonauts, making life difficult for player characters with argonaut affiliations.

In a stand-alone argonauts campaign, the tables may be turned. Firewall is a useful but protean ally, its internal politics opaque to outsiders. Firewall servers that appear in argonaut campaigns might be friendly allies—or they might kidnap and mindwipe argonauts believed to know too much about Firewall's activities.

Beyond this, the argonauts' many consulting relationships can form an interesting basis for a campaign. An argonaut consulting team might be called in for a wide variety of missions in service of polities, corporations, or individuals. Xenoplanet expeditions value argonaut xenolinguists, xenobiologists, and first-contact specialists. Efforts to contain hostile machine life might draw on argonaut experience dealing with wild artificials, emerged AGIs, or nanoplagues. Finally, the argonauts boast many battle-hardened TITAN experts. Both the Consortium and the Titanians have commissioned argonaut research on the TITAN Quarantine Zone and the tunnels of Iapetus, respectively.

Team composition in an argonauts game should skew heavily toward engineering and the sciences, but this doesn't mean combat- or social-oriented characters should be absent. The places argonauts have to go to do research and the other polities they have to deal with call for different skills.

Hypercorps and Oligarchs

Firewall's reputation as an organization heavily influenced by argonauts and autonomists has some truth to it, but there are no small number of agents from the corporate sphere, as well. Firewall can't afford for the inner system to be a blind spot, and it finds no shortage of recruits from all walks of life. The modern working world is composed heavily of contractors juggling work from multiple hypercorp clients. For some agents, Firewall becomes effectively another client—albeit a demanding, pro-bono one, possibly with personal, emotional strings attached. If you meet someone on Mars who didn't lose someone in the Fall, it's probably because they haven't yet reached the age

PLASMA SWORD

BLADE	ARMOR PENETRATION (AP)	DAMAGE VALUE (DV)	AVERAGE DV
Plasma Sword	–8	2d10 + 8	19

of 10. Hypercorp proxies are often people who lost their entire lives in the Fall and have dedicated themselves to the cause—but they can just as easily have more cynical views.

Recruits can come from just about anywhere in the hypercorp pecking order, but Firewall scouts actively where there are high-value recruits to be had. Infosec contractors, cops, scientists, social networkers, and transportation workers are all sought after for their analytical or operational utility. Oligarchs who join Firewall generally do so on their own terms, by surveiling the organization and then revealing themselves to offer their services. Firewall, for its part, accepts these elders warily, even when they come from founding cliques like Bainbridge's network of hyper-aged allies. Such beings have great power to harm Firewall if they ever turned.

Stand-alone hypercorp campaigns offer a huge variety of possibilities, from deep-space salvage crews, to spaghetti-western action with Martian rangers, to urban legal thrillers. The characters can be a network of independent contractors, employees of a larger corporation, or henchbeings of a hyper-aged, hyper-wealthy aristocrat. Many gatecrashing campaigns will also have corp underpinnings, since corps control half of the Pandora gates.

Team composition in a hypercorp game depends on mission. A salvage team or icepusher crew would tend toward technical occupations, infosec, and the sciences. Gatecrashers also skew technical and scientific, but with additional emphasis on wilderness survival and combat skills. In an urban, corporate espionage campaign, social characters and stealth combat specialists have their day, with help from hackers.

Jovians

Firewall and the Jovian Republic aren't a natural fit, and the few Jovian Firewall agents operate far afield of the organization's typical playbook. Their government is a police state, many refuse to resleeve, and most of the usual Firewall recruitment tests are impossible to perform. On top of this, Jovian operatives often need to resort to older tools of tradecraft, like physical brush passes and dead drops, because of the locked down information networks in their home territory. The real identity of Tio Silencio, the top Jovian proxy, isn't even known to other top proxies, nor does the rest of the Eye have much more than Silencio's word on the size of Firewall's Jovian operation. The other Jovian proxies are equally cryptic and extremely cautious in their dealings with the larger organization. Jovian servers run like cells in a cell-structure conspiracy, with rigid compartmentalization of knowledge about operations and agent identities.

A Firewall campaign set inside the Jovian Republic can be tuned to the claustrophobic and paranoid, akin to John LeCarré's Cold War spy tales. Jovian sentinels are cut off from the rest of Firewall, and unlike most *Eclipse Phase* characters, they can in many cases die for real. There's also no quarter if Jovian government agencies stumble on an operation. Where a captured Firewall operative might be whisked off to make a devil's handshake with Ozma in exchange for their ass in a hypercorp campaign, in a Jovian setting, they're headed for life in Maui Patera—if they survive interrogation.

Stand-alone Jovian campaigns can focus on the Jovian intelligence services described in this book or they can involve underground social movements like the anarchist JAC. The Catholic Church has influence over many aspects of Jovian society, making a game where some or all of the players are clergy an interesting possibility. Finally, gamemasters wanting to delve into prison drama won't find a more extreme setting than the Maui Patera rehabilitation center on Io.

Team composition in a Jovian game will vary as it does for hypercorp games, but with two important changes. First, characters in Jovian games may have occupations that elsewhere in the *Eclipse Phase* setting have been taken over by AIs and automation. Second, you'll have to decide, taking into account your players' preferences, how to treat death and resleeving. You may simply decide that no one has a cortical stack or backups. In such a campaign, getting illegal access to backup equipment and keeping it undiscovered can be a sub-plot all its own. Alternatively, you might prefer to put the characters in possession of stacks and illegal backup facilities from the start. This dials down the paranoia of the Jovian setting a bit, but the danger of having the secret backup facility discovered should always hang in the air.

Religious Groups

Religious groups run the gamut from those already tied to Firewall (Societas Iude), to those that might be friendly (White Butterfly), to exsurgent cults who've twisted their dogmas to serve the virus. In a Firewall campaign, affiliation with one of these groups can influence a proxy's decision making or give them additional resources to call upon. This is particularly true for Jovian proxies, many of whom have ties to Societas Iude. Player characters with ties to one of these groups may have to walk a line between spiritual belief and Firewall's interests.

Stand-alone campaigns using religious groups offer a chance to explore how a spiritual belief system might evolve in conditions of material abundance, functional immortality, and radically altered social mores. As written, the average person in the *Eclipse Phase* setting is irreligious, unaccustomed to accommodating religious restrictions on behavior, and flexible on lifestyle choices such as non-monogamy and drug use. For conservative religious characters, the entire world seems kind of insane, and even moderates should feel moments of otherness from the general population.

Team composition varies in campaigns based on religious groups. Holy-warrior types skew toward combat, reclaimer outfits like White Butterfly focus on counter-TITAN and survival skills, and groups like the Societas Iude tend to be more intellectual, attracting scientists and hackers.

TITAN HUNTERS

Where there's crossover between Firewall and TITAN-hunting outfits, it's either because Firewall has infiltrated the group or because someone with actual talent got recruited by the Eye and cut ties to their old, often amateur outfit. Firewall has contact with some of the less cowboyish TITAN-hunter groups, but there's no overlap in membership. At best, some TITAN hunters are deemed friendlies, called on by proxies either for intel or out of desperation. Maverick proxies are more likely to deal with TITAN hunters than any other clique within Firewall. Other proxies, particularly in the backups and structuralist wings of Firewall, are actively hostile to TITAN hunters, deeming them a huge security and infection risk.

Stand-alone TITAN-hunter campaigns can come in many flavors, from urban-noir revenge drama to high-octane thriller. Most TITAN-hunter groups are small, and they operate on shoestring budgets. TITAN hunters are the best choice for a "Quarantine Zones & Dragons" campaign, where the hunters' activities focus around killing the monsters and getting probably-insanely-dangerous high-tech treasure that equips them for bigger and badder challenges. On the other extreme, an intrigue-laden campaign with more subtle hunters and prey—focused on ego hunting, infosec, and rep networks—is more interesting to some groups.

Team composition in a TITAN-hunter game varies based on the group's mission. A "QZ&D" team will skew heavily toward combat, infiltration, nanowarfare, and infosec. In a detective-style campaign, hackers, ego hunters, and fixers will shine.

TITANIANS

Firewall and the Titanian Commonwealth have a complicated history of relations, detailed elsewhere. While this relationship sometimes leads to mutual assistance, it's also possible for it to complicate Firewall missions. Despite the schism with their colleagues in the intel services, Titanian proxies often maintain back-channel ties to Commonwealth governmental agencies. Other proxies are microcorp entrepreneurs or influential academics with access to the Titanian political elite. Titanian servers fall mostly in the pragmatist camp of the Eye, and their operating practices fall close to the "default" Firewall recruiting and security practices described earlier. Titanian servers strive to recruit the best and brightest, and the influence of the argonauts on the Titanian university system increases this tendency. At the same time, the ranks of the armed services, the police, and the underworld are well represented.

Stand-alone Titanian campaigns can have a range of flavors. It's been said in forum discussions that if one wanted an "Eclipse Trek" style of science and exploration campaign, the Titanians possess the likeliest combination of idealism and scientific orientation. At the same time, Titan lends itself well to gritty crime stories. The conventions of the Nordic Crime and Tartan Noir sub-genres fit well into the Commonwealth setting, and the Titanian underworld offers no shortage of colorful characters, such as the body thieves and chess-boxing concerns of New Quebec. Titanian gatecrashing ventures and interstellar exploration can go in the Trek-like direction mentioned earlier or can veer off into survival horror when something goes wrong for an isolated expedition. The weird tunnels of Iapetus wait to be explored, as do the wilds of Titan itself. Finally, Titan is host to an unusually vibrant school of mash-up journalism exemplified by the likes of Momo von Satan and her Monster Raging Goblin Cock News Network. Investigative journalism on Titan is part espionage, part juxtaposition-driven art form, part source cultivation, and part showmanship, meaning that it requires a multi-role team willing to go to great lengths to get the story.

Team composition in a Titanian game varies from that in a hypercorp setting principally in terms of legal and cultural differences. Titanian characters are more likely to have cyberbrains and their nanotech specialists face fewer restrictions on what they can fabricate. Uplifts and AGIs have full legal status and face less prejudice. Infomorphs, forks, and characters with unusual mental or physical augmentations are more accepted, if not warmly embraced. And games set in the spook world of the Titanian intelligence services can veer in a posthuman direction, given the way these agencies encourage extreme self-augmentation. Characters in such games may be the sort of bizarre, almost asocial, hyper-specialized posthumans seen in some of the works of Bruce Sterling and Peter Watts. In this type of campaign, as in an argonauts campaign, gamemasters need to work hard to make sure that specialized characters have their moment to shine.

ULTIMATES

The ultimates and Firewall have traded infiltrators, come up empty handed, and now eye one another warily. The ultimates are one of the few factions not well-represented among Firewall's proxies. For their part, the ultimates have prevented anyone from Firewall from reaching above their lowest echelons. Sentinels recruited from the ultimates receive special handling. On one hand, they're put through more rigorous loyalty tests to ensure that they're not simply infiltrators. It's an open secret that no professed ultimate has ever made proxy (though there are a number of ex-ultimates), but that seems not to discourage some ultimates, drawn by the challenge of facing transhumanity's most dangerous enemies. On the other hand, Firewall doesn't try to drive ultimates recruits away. They're often just too useful to pass up.

Stand-alone ultimate campaigns offer thrilling possibilities for action and philosophical exploration, alongside some potentially gut-wrenching moments when the faction is acting at its most brutal. Groups who want an emotionally safe campaign may prefer to downplay the negative aspects of the ultimates, simply playing them as elite mercenaries obsessed with extreme self-improvement. Playing the ultimates as written is a challenge. Their philosophy is

proto-fascist in terms of its extreme group identity and beatification of Manu Battacharaya. Even worse is their ideological hostility toward those they perceive as weak or genetically inferior.

When characters who hold views like these come into conflict with other factions, it inspires drama. Ultimates are still transhumans, acknowledging their kinship to "lesser" humanity. How is this identity challenged by encounters with exhumans, who it might be argued have become stronger by abandoning more of their human identity than the ultimates have? And how is their belief in factional superiority challenged when they run up against the elites of other factions, like the Consortium or Titanians? Do the Spartans learn anything from the Athenians?

And what of the group's internal drama and tensions with their own faction? The temptation is to run an ultimate campaign as straight-up military science fiction, but a much more interesting exploration of how fascism affects people on a small scale is presented by the literature of outlaw motorcycle clubs. Hunter S. Thompson's *Hells Angels,* while problematic from a feminist standpoint, delves explicitly into the parallels between outlaw MCs and street-level fascist movements. Just substitute extreme custom morphs for Harleys and the ultimates don't look too different from *Sons of Anarchy.* It should be noted that core *Eclipse Phase,* with its simulationist orientation, isn't necessarily the best tool for running a campaign driven by questions about the effects of extreme group identification on the individual. Consider hacking something like *Apocalypse World* as an alternative. Or, if using *Eclipse Phase,* try tinkering with Motivations and Moxie awards such that they act as a currency of loyalty. Requiring each character to have at least one Motivation that runs counter to ultimate ideology also offers a source of tension.

Team composition in an ultimate game depends on whether the team is a mercenary company or a more individualistic outfit. Ultimate mercs, especially in battle, tend to be fairly uniform in equipment and cross-trained on each other's specialist weaponry. Everyone fights, but a team usually has its specialists in infosec, hardware, and infiltration roles. Remade morphs are the norm. In more individualistic teams, a broader range of specialties will be represented, with scientists and social operators in the mix, and with a great variety of augmentations to morphs.

The Titanian Schism

Magnus Ming, Tara Yu, and many other Titanian Firewall operatives were once part of Survival Research Agenda, a think tank with strong ties to the argonauts that worked with both the Titanian Government and Firewall during the Fall. After the Fall, a split occurred between members who were pro-Firewall and those who favored the Titanian intel community.

The split occurred because one side did something that made close cooperation impossible. The precise reason is meant to be a secret, and it's left to individual gamemasters to pick a reason that suits their campaign. What follows are some possibilities to explore, divided among "Driving Forces" (the people or situations that might have pushed things toward a split), "Reasons" (the facts on the ground that forced the split), and "Twists" (possible unexpected outcomes).

Note that adopting some of these options in your campaign may change the default picture of what Titanian intel knows.

Driving Forces

These are the people or situations that might have pushed things toward a split.

Disagreement over Iapetus

The Schism resulted from an academic quarrel that got out of hand. The faction that had more influence prevailed with the Commonwealth government in their hypothesis regarding why the TITANs were building a matrioshka brain beneath Iapetus. This caused all funding and authorization for research into other explanations to disappear—a grave oversight as far as the proto-Firewall faction were concerned.

Hidden Sibyls

The prognosticating seed AIs known as the Sibyls disappeared before the Fall and are thought to have been a neutral party during that time. In fact, the Sibyls hid almost in plain sight—taking up a position of influence with CID and using that influence to save their own bytes during the Fall. CID has made more than one devil's bargain to keep their patronage, acting as much in Sibyl interests as in the Commonwealth's.

ASI Factionalism

Like the TITANs, the Prometheans aren't a hive mind. They're individuals of god-like intellect, and as in the mythologies of old, gods rarely get along. One faction of Prometheans are patrons of Firewall, while another faction supports Fleet Intelligence. Alternatively, Fleet may have another type of patron entirely: one of the Sibyls or even a renegade TITAN! Whatever the case, it's unlikely either side's ASIs will have tipped their hand as to their influence. The first rule of manipulating transhumans to your own ends is to keep them from knowing they're being manipulated. But the ASIs on either side know of each other, and whatever game they're playing will be for keeps.

Stories of an Alien Fall

Whether due to recovery of the Iktomi Drt'drt Kyu K'hikk (Record of the Eradication Years) or the successful downloading of the Well of Lies, an alien AGI that claims to remember its creator civilization's own hard-takeoff singularity, one side of the Schism subscribes to a radically different hypothesis on the origin and purpose of the exsurgent virus than the other. The difference is more than an academic dispute; it has led to one organization adopting

standard-operating procedures for the virus that the other considers very dangerous. Encounters between their field agents are therefore touch-and-go affairs.

Reasons

These are the facts on the ground that forced the split.

Bought Into ETI Enlightenment Hypothesis

Contact with the TITANs during the Fall, archeological investigation of Iapetus, and intercepted communications among pre-Fall governments are interpreted by CID to mean that transhumanity tragically misunderstood the so-called "Fall." The TITANs somehow contacted an extraterrestrial intelligence and thereby gained profound insight into the universe. The TITANs then acted to elevate transhumanity to this higher understanding as quickly as possible—by forcibly uploading minds. If one understands "death" due to forced uploading as attempted benevolence, the tragic destruction and loss of life during the Fall came not from the TITANs, but from paranoia and opportunism of Earth factions as they fought among themselves. While many in Firewall would ridicule this idea, they can't disavow it completely, because they have colleagues in the Eye who believe it, too.

Any of the *ETI Agenda* entries (p. 353, *EP*) could also be at work. Whether CID has actually surmised the existence of the ETI and what they believe about it is left to the gamemaster.

Cut and Run

Titanian intel's analysis of TITAN capabilities and motives has led them to plan for a second TITAN invasion in a way unacceptable to Firewall. They've sold the highest ranks of Commonwealth government on a cut-and-run strategy, that if implemented would abandon the rest of transhumanity to its fate exactly when Titan's fleet and defenses would be most needed.

Incorrect Theories

For some reason, the Titanian intelligence services believe something dangerously incorrect about the exsurgent virus. It could have to do with how the virus is transferred, how long it stays dormant in a given person before expressing, how it jumps from machine to biological life, or whether it's possible to cure people. Whatever the reason, it creates a fundamental incompatibility between Firewall and the Commonwealth's practices in the field. The incorrect theory must be sufficiently subtle that repeated contact with actual exsurgents hasn't dispelled it. For example, perhaps the way Fleet screens field operatives to see if they've been exposed has some margin of error—small enough that it's effective 99% of the time, but still too high a margin of error for Firewall's liking.

Mistrust of the Prometheans

By this point of view, the Prometheans aren't allies of transhumanity, but are manipulating it toward their own goals. Survival Research Agenda's pro-Commonwealth faction cited evidence suggesting that the Prometheans acted with little regard for transhuman lives during the Fall, seemingly being more intent on self-preservation and victory over the TITANs. The proto-Firewall faction either didn't find this evidence compelling or had counter-evidence of their own. In this version of events, relations between Fleet Intelligence and Firewall are probably considerably chillier than described elsewhere, as the Commonwealth intel community believes Firewall to be the cat's paws of a bunch of probably-very-dangerous rogue ASIs.

Monkeying More With the Monkey Puzzle

By analyzing logs of deep-space transmissions from before the Fall, CID pinpointed the origin of the earliest signals identifiable as having hallmarks of TITAN communications. Fleet's navigators extrapolated the likely orbital paths of a physical object originating at or near that point. Eventually, Fleet recovered the ETI Bracewell probe that infected the TITANs with the exsurgent virus in the first place. The probe is massive, so rather than moving it, a facility designed to camouflage it from other polities and facilitate research was built around it. Since the probe responds primarily to seed AIs, it's ignored the researchers—so far. In this version of events, the Firewall-Commonwealth intel détente is as much the result of blackmail as anything else. That the probe has been found is one of both Firewall and CID's greatest secrets. But the risk to CID is greater, as Firewall's Titanian inner circle members revealing its existence to the public would be a black stain on CID's reputation.

Twists

These are possible unexpected outcomes of the Schism.

Firewall Is Wrong About Everything

Just because Firewall are the default "good guys" in *Eclipse Phase* doesn't mean they get everything right. In this scenario, they get almost nothing right. Firewall is dead wrong in its interpretation of one or more key events during or after the Fall, and CID, if not totally correct, is much closer to the truth.

Imminent Invasion

A major incursion or an outright second invasion of transhuman space by the TITANs is imminent. Between Firewall and CID, the intelligence needed to counter the attack exists. One side even knows the hammer is about to fall! But the schism between the two means that cooperation could come too little, too late.

Ozma Disinformation

The Schism was purposely engineered by Project Ozma. One or both sides have fallen for an Ozma disinformation campaign. The driving force and/or the reason for the schism appear to be one of the above, but in reality, Ozma set the whole thing up to drive a wedge between two of its most potent rival organizations.

FIREWALL SCRATCH SPACE RANDOM INVENTORY

Firewall cells use scratch spaces to temporarily store gear and stash various items acquired during missions. Sometimes, these caches are lost or forgotten, or abandoned for long periods. One never knows what one will find when accessing an old scratch space. The table below provides some interesting suggestions, some of which could be used as plot hooks or to lend mystery to an ongoing campaign.

D100 ROLL	ITEM
01–02	A single deactivated picklock flexbot module (p. 202, *Transhuman*) that has impeded shape-adjusting functions.
03–04	A data storage unit with decryption keys to several key Jovian military communication channels.
05–06	An unmarked sealed canister containing an active TITAN nanoswarm (p. 383, *EP*)
07–08	The space is entirely filled with biomechanical filaments sprouted from a long-deceased victim of the melder nanovirus (p. 384, *EP*). Opening the space releases the nanoplague into the local environment.
09–10	A data storage unit with what appears to be a complex but safe route for bypassing the killsat interdiction of Earth with a small, stealthed shuttle.
11–12	Three amazingly lifelike statues (the byproduct of the petrifier nanovirus; p. 384, *EP*).
13–14	An archaic leafblower loaded with 5 doses of Factor dust toxin (p. 376, *EP*).
15–16	A morph storage pod (p. 175) that is filled with a live, trapped jelly exsurgent (p. 370, *EP*) rather than nutrient gel.
17–18	A morph storage pod (p. 175) containing a neotenic morph that has been permanently decerebrated by the exsurgent psi-gamma sleight (p. 371, *EP*).
19–20	All of the parts necessary to build a neutrino transceiver (p. 314, *EP*) with the right skills and tools, minus the quantum farcasting computer.
21–22	An XP storage unit containing the lifelog of a well-known post-Fall porn star—complete with a basilisk hack (p. 364, *EP*) recording one-third of the way through.
23–24	A data storage unit containing an alpha fork of a prominent Planetary Consortium leader.
25–26	A functional but severely battered battlesuit exoskeleton (p. 344, *EP*).
27–28	A Dr. Bot (p. 344, *EP*) that is infected with a digital strain of the exsurgent virus.
29–30	A rack of 5 opteryx synthmorphs (p. 194, *Transhuman*) each modified with neurachem and chameleon skin.
31–32	A plasma rifle. A Hardware: Armorer Test will reveal that it has a dangerous malfunction. Each time it is used there is a 10% chance it will explode, inflicting damage as a plasmaburst grenade.
33–34	A colony of smart rats that survived in the space by learning to use a maker.
35–36	A specimen container with what appears to be a large alien bug from an unknown exoplanet.
37–38	A bloody, excised ghostrider module containing a dormant muse once belonging to a Titanian minister.
39–40	A light vacsuit that looks and smells like someone was eaten in it.
41–42	A skillsoft for Exotic Melee Weapons: Monowire Garrote and a monowire garrote (p. 334, *EP*).
43–44	A cornucopia machine with blueprints for building a thermonuclear warhead, but lacking the necessary uranium feedstock.
45–46	An ego bridge that has been hacked so that it pretends to, but doesn't actually, overwrite the minds of morphs that the user is evacuating.
47–48	A storage crate containing two dozen disembodied cyberbrains.
49–50	A high-capacity qubit reservoir, with no indication of what the qubits are paired with.
51–52	A small garden maintained by robots with a number of rare Earth plants and a single flower with 10 petals (p. 322, *EP*) of an unknown type.
53–54	A limited-edition heirloom morph (p. 187, *Transhuman*) made with the genetics of Ray Kurzweil.
55–56	A specialized hypercorp research server (p. 145, *Transhuman*) stolen from ExoTech.
57–58	A large data module with 1,500 infugees from Earth in cold storage.
59–60	A disabled but mostly intact headhunter drone (p. 383, *EP*)
61–62	A living human child, subsisting on a maker and camping gear, with no memories of who they are.
63–64	The transcript of a private, decrypted chat between two powerful oligarchs detailing the particulars of an elaborate deal ongoing between them for decades.
65–66	A data storage unit with surveillance footage of a thorough exsurgent outbreak on a major habitat—which Firewall knows nothing about.
67–68	A scour ring (p. 165, *Gatecrashing*).
69–70	The decapitated head of Elon Musk in a medical storage tank.
71–72	A blue box portable gate control unit (p. 155, *Gatecrashing*) that has the unfortunate tendency to quietly alter any plugged-in gate addresses.
73–74	A medical kit with what appears to be a long finger wrapped in gauze. Genetic testing shows its DNA is not transhuman in origin.
75–76	A swarm of 6 guardian angel bots (p. 344, *EP*) that are programmed to attack anyone that accesses the scratch space.
77–78	A neogenetic replica of what appears to be a living xenomorph egg from an ancient pre-Fall vid called *Alien*, made by a Genetic Arts student.
79–80	A rosary. Upon closer inspection, each bead is a capsule containing a dose of the degen pathogen (p. 324, *EP*).
81–82	A small refrigeration unit holding 20 doses of psike-out (p. 325, *EP*) with an Addiction Modifier of –20.
83–84	The intact but damaged Philae lander, landed on Comet 67P/Churyumov-Gerasimenko by ESA's Rosetta mission back in the year 2014.
85–86	A circled pentagram drawn with spraypaint in the center of the room. The area within the circle up to the ceiling is affected by a casimir perturbance (p. 8, *Zone Stalkers*) of unknown origin.
87–88	A dirty and rank fish tank, filled with long-dead creatures, empty of water. To one side is a small, metallic disc that strangely produces an intense amount of heat.
89–90	A dreamcatcher-like artifact recognizable as an Iktomi relic (p. 376, *EP*) with an appropriate skill test.
91–92	An ancient seal, bordered in ivory and encased in crystal, identifiable as the Sacred Seal of Muhammad.
93–94	A data module carrying nanofab blueprints for a proprietary, still-unreleased, advanced model of seeker rifle.
95–96	An ecto carrying the crypto codes and software needed to use an undiscovered backdoor into the core functions of the Fame reputation network.
97–98	An advanced nanodetector prototype (+20 to nano detection tests) occasionally prone (5% chance) to issuing false-positive alerts.
99–00	A data module with research results for an unpublished study regarding highly unusual and alarming weather patterns on Venus.

FIREWALL CROW

APTITUDES

	COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM	WIL
Base	25	10	25	15	25	10	15
Morph Bonus	5		5			10	5
Total	30	10	30	15	25	20	20

STATS

MOX	TT	LUC	IR	WT	DUR	DR	INIT	SPD
1	8	40	80	8	40	60	9	1

SKILLS

	APT	BASE	MORPH BONUS	TOTAL
Academics: Biochemistry	COG	45	5	50
Academics: Linguistics	COG	65	5	70
Academics: Psychology	COG	55	5	60
Academics: Xenolinguistics	COG	60	5	65
Art: Drama	INT	60	5	65
Clubs	SOM	40	10	50
Control	WIL	40	5	45
Deception	SAV	35		35
Fray	REF	55		55
Freerunning	SOM	25	10	35
Interest: Factor Trivia	COG	60	5	65
Interest: Pre-Fall Media	COG	45	5	50
Kinesics	SAV	30		30
Kinetic Weapons (Pistols)	COO	30 (40)		30 (40)
Language: Native Hungarian	INT	95	5	100
Language: !Kung	INT	35	5	40
Language: Arabic	INT	55	5	60
Language: English	INT	50	5	55
Language: Mandarin	INT	45	5	50
Medicine: Psychiatry	COG	55	5	60
Networking: Autonomists	SAV	40		40
Networking: Firewall	SAV	45		45
Networking: Scientists	SAV	65		65
Perception	INT	65	5 (25)	70 (90)
Persuasion	SAV	45	(10)	45 (55)
Profession: Memetic Engineering	COG	60	5	65
Protocol	SAV	35		35
Psychosurgery	COG	70	5	75
Research	COG	65	5	70
Sense	INT	55	5	60

Background: **Uplift**
Faction: **Argonaut**
Morph: **Neanderthal**
Motivations: **+Knowledge +Risk –Violence**

TRAITS

Ego: Mental Disorder (Depression), Mental Disorder (Mythomania), Psi (Level 2)

SLEIGHTS

Psi-Chi: Instinct, Pattern Recognition
Psi-Gamma: Empathic Scan, Thought Browse

REP

i-rep: 40
r-rep: 30

EQUIPMENT

Armor: Smart Vacsuit (Light) (w/ Immunogenic System) + Second Skin [8/7] ■
Primary Weapon: Shock Baton ■
Starting Credit: 4,700 ■
Implants: Basic Biomods, Basic Mesh Inserts, Cortical Stack, Eidetic Memory, Enhanced Hearing, Enhanced Pheromones, Hyper Linguist, Medichines ■
Gear: Backup Insurance (1 month), Guardian Angel (Swivel Mount, Light Pistol w/ 50 rounds), Hyperspectral Microphone, Klar (4 doses), Medium Pistol w/ 100 AP Homing rounds, Muse, Neem (1 dose) ■

It's not science if you don't get dirty. Neurolinguistic programming is the sort of work most people do in a lab with vat-grown brains, but you spend every moment you can in the field, collecting data and chasing leads. For Firewall, you're finding vulnerabilities in the transhuman cognitive architecture so they can shut down threats before they get started. Really, you do this sort of work for yourself; a window into the success of Homo sapiens and clues to the demise of your own ancestors. Either way, you hack brains with words, and you're dangerous enough to warrant your own x-threat factor. Good thing you're working for the good guys. ■

"Some knowledge man was not meant to know. Fortunately, I am no man."

FIREWALL ERASER

APTITUDES

	COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM	WIL
Base	5	25	15	20	10	20	10
Morph Bonus		5		5		5 (10)	
Total	5	30	15	25	10	25 (30)	10

STATS

MOX	TT	LUC	IR	WT	DUR	DR	INIT	SPD
1	4	20	40	9 (12)	45 (60)	90 (120)	8	1 (2)

SKILLS

	APT	BASE	MORPH BONUS	TOTAL
Academics: History	COG	45		45
Climbing	SOM	55	10	65
Demolitions	COG	45		45
Fray (Ranged)	REF	50 (60)	5	55 (65)
Free Fall	REF	60	5	65
Freerunning	SOM	60	10 (30)	70 (90)
Gunnery	INT	55		55
Hardware: Industrial	COG	45		45
Infosec (Security)	COG	60 (70)		60 (70)
Interest: Tendai Buddhism	COG	45		45
Interest: Third-Coming Christianity	COG	75		75
Intimidation	SAV	60		60
Kinetic Weapons	COO	65	5	70
Language: Native English	INT	85		85
Language: Ancient Greek	INT	45		45
Language: Japanese	INT	55		55
Networking: Firewall	SAV	50		50
Perception	INT	15	(20)	15 (35)
Pilot: Aircraft	REF	50	5	55
Pilot: Groundcraft	REF	60	5	65
Profession: Missionary	COG	60		60
Profession: Teacher	COG	30		30
Seeker Weapons	COO	70	5	75
Unarmed Combat	SOM	60	10	70

Background: **Isolate**
Faction: **Brinker**
Morph: **Slitheroid**
Motivations: **+Protection +Self-Sacrifice +Spiritual Growth**

TRAITS
Ego: Addiction (Petals with Redemption Themes, Level 2), Ambidextrous, Brave (Level 1), Edited Memories (Level 1), Mental Disorder (Depression), Neural Damage (Logorrhea), Psi Defense (Level 1),
Morph: No Cortical Stack, Tough (Level 2)

REP
i-rep: 40

EQUIPMENT
Armor: Slitheroid shell w/Heavy Combat Armor, Ablative Patches, Fireproofing [30/26, +10 vs heat/fire] ■
Primary Weapon: Seeker Rifle w/ Extended Magazine, Smart Magazine (15 Homing Frag minimissiles, 4 Accushot EMP minimissiles, 4 Laser-Guided Thermobaric minimissiles, 6 Laser-Guided Smoke minimissiles, 2 Laser-Guided Gas minimissiles (Nervex), 15 Homing HEAP minimissiles) ■
Starting Credit: 2,600 ■
Enhancements: 360-Degree Vision, Access Jacks, Anti-Glare, Basic Mesh Inserts, Cortical Stack, Cyberbrain, Cyberclaws, Direction Sense, Echolocation, Enhanced Hearing, Enhanced Vision, Fixed Weapon Mount, Hardened Skeleton, Heavy Combat Armor, Medichines, Mnemonic Augmentation, Nanophages, Neurachem (Level 1), Pneumatic Limbs, Puppet Sock, Radar System, T-Ray Emitter ■
Gear: Acoustic Spotter, Backup Insurance (1 month), Encryption Software, Firewall Software, Guardian Angel Bot, Heavy Rail Pistol (w/ Extended Magazine, Imaging Scope, Laser Sight, 40 Homing rounds, 40 Homing AP rounds), Injectors Nanoswarm w/ Nutcracker (2), Machine Gun (w/ Extended Magazine, Gyromount, Smart Magazine, 500 Homing Hollow-Point rounds, 400 Homing AP rounds), Muse, Portable QE Comm w/ Low-Capacity Qubit Reservoir, Petals (2), Repair Spray (4), Saucer Bot (2), Scouts Nanoswarm, Sniffer, Specialized Hive (Disassemblers), Spindle and Climber, Superthermite Charge, Tactical Networks Software, Tracking Software, Utilitool ■

You've been around the system for a few turns. You followed the Lifeboat Institute as an adolescent before the Fall. When things went sour, you volunteered where you could to help stem the losses. You were one of the first recruited into Firewall. But, bit by bit, events have taken their toll on you. Now you do the jobs you wouldn't wish anyone else to do: clean-up. Firewall supports you as best it can. Your body is young and strong. But you don't know if your mind can take this much longer. And then? ■

"The gardener may cut the branch to save the tree."

FIREWALL FILTER

APTITUDES

	COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM	WIL
Base	10	15	20	15	25	5	15
Morph Bonus	5		5		5	10	
Total	15	15	25	15	30	15	15

STATS

MOX	TT	LUC	IR	WT	DUR	DR	INIT	SPD
4	6	30	60	8	40	80	8	1 (3)

SKILLS

	APT	BASE	MORPH BONUS	TOTAL
Academics: Memetics	COG	60	5	65
Academics: Psychology	COG	55	5	60
Art: Painting	INT	50	5	55
Art: Speech	INT	50	5	55
Deception (Fast Talk)	SAV	55 (65)	5	60 (70)
Fray	REF	55		55
Impersonation	SAV	50	5	55
Interest: Celebrities	COG	40	5	45
Infiltration	COO	15		15 (40)
Interfacing	COG	35	5	40
Investigation	INT	45	5 (15)	50 (60)
Kinesics	SAV	65	5	70
Language: Native Danish	INT	90	5	95
Language: Cantonese	INT	50	5	55
Language: English	INT	40	5	45
Networking: Autonomists	SAV	75 (95)	5	80 (100)
Networking: Criminals	SAV	35 (45)	5	40 (50)
Networking: Firewall	SAV	55 (65)	5	60 (70)
Networking: Hypercorps	SAV	65 (75)	5	75 (85)
Networking: Media	SAV	65 (75)	5	75 (85)
Perception	INT	50	5 (25)	55 (75)
Persuasion	SAV	75	5	80
Profession: Social Engineering	COG	60	5	65
Profession: Viral Marketing	COG	45	5	50
Protocol	SAV	65	5	70
Research	COG	45	5	50
Spray Weapons	COO	15		15 (40)

Background:
Original Space Colonist
Faction: **Titanian**
Morph: **Steel**
Motivations: **+Luxury**
+Social Activism
+Social Development Programs

TRAITS
Ego: Entrepreneur (Level 1), Gold Star (Anarchists), Social Butterfly, Stalker
Morph: Social Stigma (Clanking Masses), Uncanny Valley

Your youth was spent in the dark and hungry first years of Nyhavn on Titan. Since then you've enjoyed the luxuries of life, and you've done what you can to help others enjoy them too. You believe there's enough in the universe for everyone to live comfortably; a philosophy you fight for in your politics and business. You also believe that managing those resources is transhumanity's greatest challenge. Even though Firewall is your full-time mission, you always have a few other projects on the side as you work to bring post-scarcity to everyone. ■

REP
@-rep: 80
g-rep: 50
i-rep: 60

REP (SECOND IDENTITY)
c-rep: 80
f-rep: 70

EQUIPMENT
Armor: Steel Shell + Armor Vest + Second Skin [15/17] ■
Primary Weapon: Freezer (20 rounds) ■
Starting Credit: 3,350 ■
Enhancements: Access Jacks, Basic Mesh Inserts, Cortical Stack, Cyberbrain, Enhanced Hearing, Enhanced Smell, Medichines, Memory Lock, Mnemonic Augmentation, Multiple Personalities, Oracles, Puppet Sock, Skillware ■
Gear: Anonymous Account, Backup Insurance (1 month), Cleaner Nanoswarm, Fake Ego ID, Invisibility Cloak, Microbug (2), Muse, Passive ID Protection, Privacy Suite, Relationship Mapping Software, Shard Pistol (w/ Arm Slide, 20 rounds), Skillsoft: Infiltration, Skillsoft: Spray Weapons, Smart Roach, Taggants, White Noise Machine ■

"Wealth is an illusion of public opinion."

FIREWALL REGISTER

APTITUDES

	COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM	WIL
Base	15	15	15	15	25	10	15
Morph Bonus	5		5		5	5 (15)	
Total	20	15	20	15	30	15 (25)	15

STATS

MOX	TT	LUC	IR	WT	DUR	DR	INIT	SPD
4	6	30	60	7 (8)	35 (40)	53 (60)	7	1 (2)

SKILLS

	APT	BASE	MORPH BONUS	TOTAL
Academics: Economics	COG	65	5	70
Art: Fashion	INT	40	5	45
Blades	SOM	60	15	75
Deception	SAV	55	5	60
Fray (Ranged)	REF	35 (45)		35 (45)
Infiltration	COO	40		40
Interest: Consortium Politics	COG	45	5	50
Interest: Metalworking	COG	45	5	50
Interest: Sunward Economics	COG	45	5	50
Intimidation	SAV	55	5	60
Kinesics	SAV	50	5	55
Kinetic Weapons	COO	50		50
Language: Native English	INT	85	5	90
Language: Cantonese	INT	35	5	40
Language: French	INT	45	5	50
Networking: Autonomists	SAV	65	5	70
Networking: Criminals	SAV	45	5	50
Networking: Firewall	SAV	55	5	60
Networking: Hypercorps	SAV	55	5	60
Perception	INT	45	5 (25)	50 (70)
Persuasion	SAV	75	5 (15)	80 (90)
Pilot: Groundcraft	REF	35		35
Profession: Accounting	COG	55	5	60
Profession: Social Engineering	COG	55	5	60
Protocol	SAV	55	5	60
Research	COG	35	5	40

Background: **Fall Evacuee**
Faction: **Extropian**
Morph: **Exalt**
Motivations: **+Assets +Style –Risk**

TRAITS
None

REP

@-rep:	80
c-rep:	60
f-rep:	40
g-rep:	80
i-rep:	30

EQUIPMENT

Armor: Armor Vest (w/ Shock Proof) + Bioweave Armor (Light) + Smart Skin + Light Helmet [13/13] ■
Primary Weapon: Plasma Sword ■
Starting Credit: 25,200 ■
Implants: Access Jacks, Basic Biomods, Basic Mesh Inserts, Bodysculpting, Bioweave Armor (Light), Cortical Stack, Cyberbrain, Cyberlimb Plus, Endocrine Control, Enhanced Hearing, Enhanced Pheromones, Enhanced Vision, Hardened Skeleton, Hyper Linguist, Math Boost, Medichines, Mnemonic Augmentation, Nanophage, Neurachem (Level 1), Poison Glands (BTX), Puppet Sock, T-Ray Emitter ■
Gear: Backup Insurance (1 month), Ground Car, Muse, Privacy Suite, Security AI, Submachine Rail Gun (w/ Silencer, 100 AP rounds) ■

Be it social or financial, it's capital that keeps the solar system spinning. In your previous life you made paupers into kings and ruled a nation through their pocketbooks. Since the Fall, you've decided to invest in something more permanent. Now you're keeping Firewall solvent, pulling every trick you know and making up a few new ones to finance missions that bring back no ROI for the balance sheets. You take pride in your work and in yourself, and you're willing to adopt whatever politics or lifestyle that will yield the most profit (for Firewall). Meanwhile, you're building a reputation for getting things done, and you've done a good job hiding all the bodies. It's a good life. ■

"Politics is a function of economics."

FIREWALL ROUTER

APTITUDES

	COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM	WIL
Base	15	10	20	10	30	5	15
Morph Bonus		5	5			5	
Total	15	15	25	10	30	10	15

STATS

MOX	TT	LUC	IR	WT	DUR	DR	INIT	SPD
2	6	30	60	8	40	80	7 (10)	1

SKILLS

	APT	BASE	MORPH BONUS	TOTAL
Academics: Economics	COG	55		55
Academics: Psychology	COG	60		60
Academics: Sociology	COG	55		55
Art: Literature	INT	40	5	45
Art: Knots	INT	50	5	55
Beam Weapons	COO	60	5	65
Climbing	SOM	35	5 (45)	40 (80)
Deception	SAV	60	(30)	60 (90)
Flight	SOM	35	5	40
Fray	REF	50		50
Free Fall	REF	10	(10)	10 (20)
Impersonation	SAV	50	(30)	50 (80)
Infiltration	COO	10	5 (15)	15 (25)
Infosec	COG	50		50
Interest: Strategy Games	COG	45		45
Interfacing	COG	50		50
Intimidation	SAV	60		60
Investigation	INT	20	5 (15)	25 (35)
Kinesics	SAV	60		60
Language: Native English	INT	90	5	95
Language: Arabic	INT	40	5	45
Networking: Autonomists	SAV	50		50
Networking: Criminals	SAV	60		60
Networking: Firewall	SAV	65		65
Palming	COO	40	5	45
Perception	INT	60	5 (25)	65 (85)
Persuasion	SAV	60	(–10)	60 (50)
Profession: Project Manager	COG	65		65
Profession: Social Engineering	COG	55		55
Protocol	SAV	60		60
Research	COG	65		65

While you still have a fork predicting market shifts for the argonauts, this version of you is solving real-world problems, making people smile, and perhaps delaying the eradication of the species for a few more turns of the sun." s/b "You used to predict market shifts for the argonauts, but now you solve real-world problems, make people smile, and perhaps delay the eradication of the species for a few more turns of the sun. ■

Background: **Humanities Infolife**
Faction: **Sapient**
Morph: **Takko**
Motivations: **+Etiquette +Helping +Problem-Solving**

TRAITS
Ego: Ambidextrous (Level 3), Real World Naiveté, Social Stigma (AGI)

REP
@-rep: 60
g-rep: 50
i-rep: 80

EQUIPMENT
Armor: Takko Shell + Second Skin [11/10] ■
Primary Weapon: Particle Beam Bolter (2) ■
Starting Credit: 2,700 ■
Enhancements: 360-Degree Vision, Access Jacks, Basic Mesh Inserts, Chameleon Skin, Chemical Sniffer, Cortical Stack, Cyberbrain, Eidetic Memory, Emergency Farcaster, Emotional Dampers, Enhanced Hearing, Enhanced Vision, Extra Limbs, Grip Pads, Math Boost, Medichines, Mental Speed, Mnemonic Augmentation, Oracles, Polarization Vision, Puppet Sock, Radar System ■
Gear: Active ID Protection, Anonymous Account, Automech Bot, Backup Insurance (1 month), Encryption Software, Facial/Image Recognition Software, Firewall Software, Fiberoptic Cable, Guardian Nanoswarm, Holographic Projectors, Laser/Microwave Link, Laser Pulser, Miniature Radio Farcaster, Muse, Probability Mapping Software, Privacy Suite, Portable QE Communicator w/ Low-Capacity Qubit Reservoir, Radio Booster, Repair Spray (4) ■

"Humans have a funny way of getting themselves into trouble."

FIREWALL SCANNER

APTITUDES

	COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM	WIL
Base	20	20	20	10	15	5	15
Morph Bonus	5				5		
Total	25	20	20	10	20	5	15

STATS

MOX	TT	LUC	IR	WT	DUR	DR	INIT	SPD
1	6	30	60	—	—	—	6	1 (3)

SKILLS

	APT	BASE	MORPH BONUS	TOTAL
Art: Performance	INT	60		60
Art: Pre-Fall Agitprop	INT	35		35
Deception	SAV	60	5	65
Flight	SOM	40		40
Hardware: Robotics	COG	30	5	35
Impersonation	SAV	45	5	50
Infiltration	COO	60		60
Infosec	COG	50	5	55
Interest: Celebrity Gossip	COG	60	5	65
Interest: Consumer Robots	COG	35	5	40
Interest: Hypercorp Politics	COG	60	5	65
Interest: Inner-System Markets	COG	60	5	65
Interfacing	COG	45	5	50
Investigation	INT	60		60
Kinesics	SAV	35	5	40
Kinetic Weapons	COO	60		60
Language: Native Arabic	INT	90		90
Networking: Autonomists	SAV	55	5	60
Networking: Firewall	SAV	55	5	60
Networking: Hypercorps	SAV	60	5	65
Profession: Law	COG	60	5	65
Profession: Media	COG	60	5	65
Profession: Social Engineering	COG	50	5	55
Protocol	SAV	55	5	60
Psychosurgery	INT	60		60
Research	COG	60	5	65

Background: **Fall Evacuee**
Faction: **Venusian**
Morph: **Agent Eidolon**
Motivations: **+Morningstar Alliance +Panopticon –Privacy**

TRAITS
Ego: AGI Affinity, Ego Plasticity (Level 2), Identifiable Quirk

REP
@-rep: 80
c-rep: 70
i-rep: 50

EQUIPMENT
Armor: [0/0] ■
Primary Weapon: None ■
Starting Credit: 3,300 ■

Software: Autodelete, Digital Veil, Eidetic Memory, Hacking Alert, Impersonate, Mental Speed, Mnemonic Augmentation, Panopticon, Tracking ■

Gear: Acoustic Spotter, Active Hyperspectral Imager, Anonymous Account, Backup Insurance (1 month), Creepy Bot (2), Fake Ego ID, Fiber Camera, Fiberoptic Microphone (2), Flat Camera, Guardian Angel Bot (2, each w/ Cyberbrain, swiveling mount SMG, Flash Suppressor, Silencer, Smart Magazine, 5 Homing Capsule rounds, 5 Homing Splash rounds, 20 Biter rounds, 20 AP rounds, Flight (5 doses), Neuropath (1 dose), Guardian Angel Bot (w/ Cyberbrain, Enhanced Vision, Sniper Rifle, Flash Suppressor, Silencer, 20 Biter rounds, 20 Homing RAP rounds), Holographic Projectors (2), Hyperspectral Flat Camera, Hyperspectral Microphone, Laser/Microwave Link (2), Lens Spotter (2), Microbug (10), Miniature Radio Farcaster, Motion Detector (3), Muse, Personal Interaction Sensor, Privacy Suite, Quantum Microbug (5), Radio Booster (2), Recon Snake Bot, Saucer Bot (4), Simulspace Subscription, Smart Dust (2), Speck Bot (4), Taggant Nanoswarm (2), X-Ray Emitter ■

You're a scanner; a professional data collector. When you started, you had to "hit the streets" to get a story. Now that sort of thing is for suckers. Limiting yourself to one brain, two eyes, and a corporeal existence just isn't an efficient expenditure of time. Now you surf the cameras, the newsfeeds, the forums. Where there is no camera, you put one. Dozens of your forks crawl over the local mesh, poking every cranny and sucking up every morsel of data—officially so it can be handed over to Firewall for further analysis, but you can't deny the thrill you get poking through the government's books and the corporate back rooms. ■

"Sunlight is the best disinfectant."

FIREWALL VECTOR

APTITUDES

	COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM	WIL
Base	20	5	20	20	10	15	15
Morph Bonus	5					5	
Total	25	5	20	20	10	20	15

STATS

MOX	TT	LUC	IR	WT	DUR	DR	INIT	SPD
4	6	30	60	7	35	53	8	1

SKILLS

	APT	BASE	MORPH BONUS	TOTAL
Academics: Computer Science	COG	65	5	70
Academics: Cryptography	COG	60	5	65
Academics: Mathematics	COG	60	5	65
Art: AR Design	INT	55		55
Art: Braincore Music	INT	45		45
Art: Computer Games	INT	60		60
Deception	SAV	50		50
Fray	REF	60		60
Free Fall	REF	40		40
Hardware: Electronics	COG	60	5	65
Hardware: Robotics	COG	40	5	45
Infosec	COG	80	5	85
Interest: Psychotropics	COG	50	5	55
Interfacing	COG	60	5	65
Language: Native Hungarian	INT	90		90
Networking: Autonomists	SAV	50		50
Networking: Firewall	SAV	60		60
Perception	INT	20	(20)	20 (40)
Persuasion	SAV	50		50
Profession: Network Engineer	COG	60	5	65
Programming	COG	60	5	65
Research	COG	60	5	65
Scrounging	INT	50		50
Spray Weapons	COO	60		60

Background: **Re-Instantiated**
Faction: **Scum**
Morph: **Ruster (Cyberbrain Variant)**
Motivations: **+Hacktivism**
+Multiplicity –Capitalism

TRAITS
Ego: Data Footprint, Edited Memories, Errant Fork, Intuitive Cracker (Level 2)

REP
@-rep: 50
i-rep: 50

EQUIPMENT
Armor: Second Skin + Heavy Body Armor (w/ Immunogenic System, Offensive Armor) + Full Helmet [17/19] ■
Primary Weapon: Torch (w/ 100 shots) ■

Before the Fall, you were a hacktivist, a member of Ano, and a reputation economy engineer. Apparently the folks at Galaxy missed that when they pulled your ego for an extended indentured servitude contract. It took you six months to get access to a farcaster and send an alpha fork to the outer system. You are that fork. Firewall is doing the sort of work you've always craved, but you haven't forgotten your fork back on Mars. Soon you'll have the reputation to arrange a rescue mission, and you have a few sentinels who will be perfect for the job. ■

Starting Credit: 350 ■
Implants: Access Jacks, Basic Biomods, Basic Mesh Inserts, Cortical Stack, Cyberbrain, Electrical Sense, Enhanced Hearing, Enhanced Respiration, Enhanced Vision, Ghostrider Module, Math Boost, Medichines, Memory Lock, Mental Speed, Mnemonic Augmentation, Puppet Sock, Radiation Sense, Temperature Tolerance, T-Ray Emitter ■
Gear: Anonymous Account, AR Illusion Software, Backup Insurance (1 month), Bughunter, Comfurt (2 doses), Covert Ops Tool, Creepy bot, Drive (5 doses), Dust Repellant, Encryption Software, Exploit Software, Fabber, Facial/Image Recognition Software, Fiberoptic Cable, Firewall Software, Fixers, Freezer (w/ 100 shots), Frequency, Gnat Bot (2), Grin (2 doses), Grip Tape, Hither (1 dose), Invisibility Cloak, Kaos AI, Klar (5 doses), Laser/Microwave Link, Microbug (2), Muse, Nanobandages (5), Orbital Hash (4 doses), Passive ID Protection, Portable QE Comm w/ Low-Capacity Qubit Reservoir, Privacy Suite, Radio Booster, Relationship Mapping Software, Repair Spray (5), Schizo (2 doses), Security AI, Sensor Motes, Shredder (w/ 100 shots), Shutter, Simulspace Subscription, Sniffer Software, Speck Bot, Specs, Spoof Software, Spray Armor, Sticky EMP Grenade (2), Tactical Network Software, Toolkit, Tracking Software, Utilitool, Viewers, White Noise Machine ■

"You want justice? The first step is pulling off the damn blindfold."

FIREWALL VETERAN SENTINEL

APTITUDES

	COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM	WIL
Base	20	20	10	15	10	5	25
Morph Bonus		5		(10)		5	5
Total	20	25	10	15 (25)	10	10	30

STATS

MOX	TT	LUC	IR	WT	DUR	DR	INIT	SPD
2	12	60	120	7	35	53	5 (7)	1 (2)

SKILLS

	APT	BASE	MORPH BONUS	TOTAL
Academics: Nanotechnology	COG	55		55
Beam Weapons	COO	60	5	65
Blades	SOM	35	5	40
Climbing	SOM	5	5 (35)	10 (40)
Control	WIL	60	5	65
Deception	SAV	65		65
Demolitions	COG	30		30
Fray	REF	55	(10)	55 (65)
Free Fall	REF	35	(10)	35 (45)
Hardware: Electronics	COG	55		55
Infiltration	COO	60	5	65
Infosec	COG	55		55
Interest: Conspiracies	COG	55		55
Interest: Hypercorp Politics	COG	55		55
Interest: Infectious Diseases	COG	35		35
Interest: TITAN Tech	COG	40		40
Investigation	INT	50		50
Language: Native Dutch	INT	80		80
Language: French	INT	50		50
Medicine: Paramedic	COG	55		55
Networking: Hypercorp	SAV	50		50
Perception	INT	30	(20)	30 (50)
Persuasion	SAV	60		60
Pilot: Groundcraft	REF	25	(10)	25 (35)
Profession: Con Schemes	COG	50		50
Profession: Psychotherapy	COG	50		50
Profession: Security Ops	COG	60		60
Profession: Smuggling Tricks	COG	40		40
Sense	INT	65		65

Background: **Re-Instantiated**
Faction: **Venusian**
Morph: **Bouncer**
Motivations: **+Autonomy +LongTerm Survival –Risk**

TRAITS
Ego: Adaptability (Level 1), Addiction (Minor, Comfurt), Dominant Strain, Edited Memories, Enemy (Somatek), Mental Disorder (Bipolar Disorder), Mental Disorder (Obsessive Compulsive), Psi (Level 2)
Morph: Limber (Level 1)

SLEIGHTS
Psi-Chi: Instinct, Pattern Recognition
Psi-Gamma: Cloud Memory, Deep Scan, Implant Memory

REP
c-rep: 40

EQUIPMENT
Armor: Bioweave (Light) + Smart Skin + Standard Vac Suit (w/ Faraday Mod) [12/12] ■
Primary Weapon: Particle Beam Bolter (w/ Imaging Scope) ■
Starting Credit: 0 ■
Implants: Adrenal Boost, Basic Biomods, Basic Mesh Inserts, Bioweave Armor (Light), Cortical Stack, Echolocation, Enhanced Vision, Grip Pads, Medichines, Neurachem (Level 1), Oxygen Reserve, Prehensile Feet ■

Gear: Backup Insurance (1 month), Chameleon Cloak, Comfurt (3 doses), Encryption Software, Exploit Software, Firewall Software, Gas Grenades (2, CR Gas), Muse, Nanobandages (5), Nanodetector, Plasmaburst Grenade, Portable Sensor, Scrapper's Gel (2), Smoke Grenades (2), Stunner, Tool Kit, Tracking Software, Vibroblade ■

You're a survivor first, a pragmatist second, a hero as a distant third. But somehow you found a career where surviving for the long-term frequently means dying in the near-term. There's a satisfaction in salvation through suicide; a pattern you've been repeating since the Fall. Still, the suicide part you skip when you can through planning, experience, and a light step. Firewall respects your skill as an investigator and your discretion in addressing what you find with a minimum of fuss and resources. ■

"Discretion is the better part of valor."

ARGONAUT PSYCHOSURGEON

APTITUDES

	COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM	WIL
Base	20	10	20	10	20	10	15
Morph Bonus	10		5		5		5
Total	30	10	25	10	25	10	20

STATS

MOX	TT	LUC	IR	WT	DUR	DR	INIT	SPD
2	8	40	80	7	35	53	7	1

SKILLS

	APT	BASE	MORPH BONUS	TOTAL
Academics: Computer Science	COG	60	10	70
Academics: Mathematics	COG	60	10	70
Academics: Neuroscience	COG	60	10	70
Academics: Physics	COG	60	10	70
Academics: Psychology	COG	60	10	70
Deception	SAV	60	5	65
Fray	REF	60		60
Free Fall	REF	20		20
Infiltration	COO	60	10	70
Infosec	COG	60		60
Interest: Exhumans	COG	60	10	70
Interfacing	COG	40	10	50
Intimidation	SAV	60	5	65
Investigation	INT	60	5 (15)	65 (75)
Kinetic Weapons	COO	60		60
Language: Native English	INT	90	5	95
Language: Russian	INT	40	5	45
Networking: Autonomists	SAV	60	5	65
Networking: Firewall	SAV	60	5	65
Networking: Scientists	SAV	60	5	65
Perception	INT	60	5	65
Profession: Surveillance	COG	60	10	70
Programming	COG	60	10	70
Psychosurgery	INT	80	5	85
Research	COG	60	10	70
Unarmed Combat	SOM	40		40

Background:
Original Space Colonist
Faction: **Argonaut**
Morph: **Menton**
Motivations: **+Morphological Freedom +Research +Technological Evolution**

TRAITS
Ego: Enemy (Cognite)

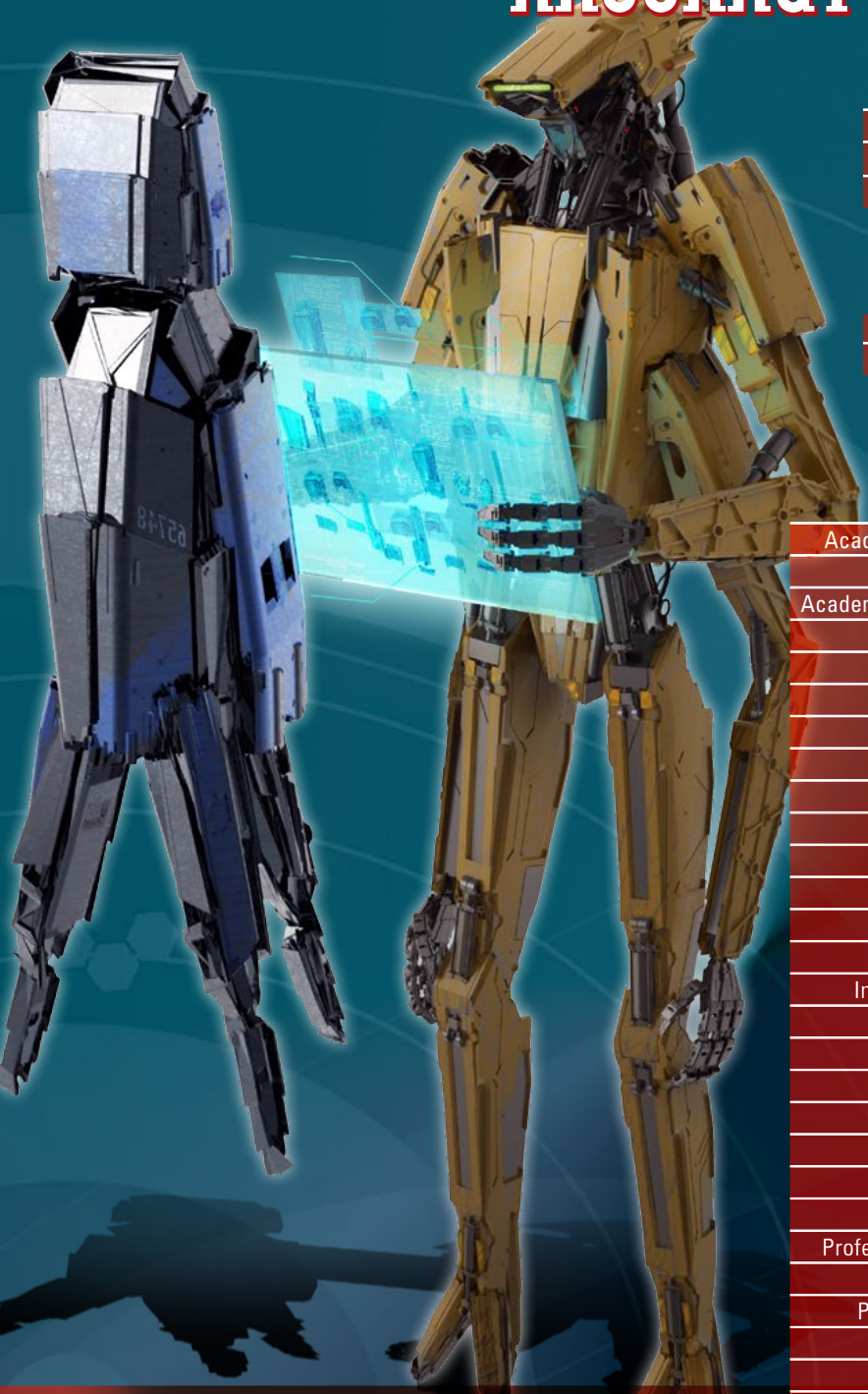
REP
@-rep: 40
i-rep: 40
r-rep: 60

EQUIPMENT
Armor: Armor Vest [6/6] ■
Primary Weapon: Heavy Pistol (w/ 100 AP Rounds) ■
Starting Credit: 1,000 ■
Implants: Basic Biomods, Basic Mesh Inserts, Cortical Stack, Eidetic Memory, Hyper Linguist, Math Boost, Medichines, Multi-Tasking, Oracles ■
Gear: Backup Insurance (1 month), Drive (2 doses), Ego Bridge, Guardian Angel Bot (w/ Heavy Pistol, 100 AP Rounds), Muse, Smart Dust ■

You are an expert on transhuman cognition, psychology, and psychosurgery. Before the Fall, you worked with the Accelerating Technologies Advisory Committee (ATAC), a UN group charged with monitoring the development of radical new tech. You were posted off-world, to keep an eye on the hypercorps and government activities. This meant you were one of the only ATAC members to survive, as the group was decimated early on during the Fall. You joined up with the argonauts, pursuing new lines of research. You are aware of Firewall, and sometimes help them out, but you've resisted their attempts to recruit you so far. A strong believer in technological evolution, some less-enlightened souls have whispered concerns about parallels between your interests and exhumanism behind your back, but they are wrong. You are simply willing to push the boundaries of what is possible for a transhuman ego, because each breakthrough improves our chances of surviving the next existential threat. This leads you to be a driving force behind many new psychosurgery research and development efforts. ■

"Existential threats are only threats because we are not yet advanced enough to render them trivial."

ARGONAUT REVERSE ENGINEER



APTITUDES

	COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM	WIL
Base	25	10	25	15	10	10	15
Morph Bonus	5					5	
Total	30	10	25	15	10	15	15

STATS

MOX	TT	LUC	IR	WT	DUR	DR	INIT	SPD
5	6	30	60	8	40	80	8	1

SKILLS

	APT	BASE	MORPH BONUS	TOTAL
Academics: Electrical Engineering	COG	60	5	65
Academics: Exotech	COG	65	5	70
Academics: Mechanical Engineering	COG	60	5	65
Academics: Nanotechnology	COG	60	5	65
Academics: Physics	COG	65	5	70
Academics: Xenophysiology	COG	45	5	50
Art: Abstract Art	INT	55		55
Beam Weapons	COO	70		70
Flight	SOM	50	5	55
Fray	REF	55		55
Hardware: Electronics	COG	70	5	75
Hardware: Robotics	COG	55	5	60
Infosec	COG	55	5	60
Interest: Football	COG	45	5	50
Interest: Hypercorp Tech News	COG	55	5	60
Interest: Jigsaw Puzzles	COG	40	5	45
Interfacing	COG	60	5	65
Investigation	INT	65		65
Language: Native Portuguese	INT	95		95
Networking: Gatecrashers	SAV	30		30
Networking: Scientists	SAV	50		50
Perception	INT	65	(20)	65 (85)
Profession: Containment Protocols	COG	45	5	50
Profession: Lab Technician	COG	45	5	50
Profession: Usability Specialist	COG	45	5	50
Programming	COG	50	5	55
Research	COG	60	5	65
Scrounging	INT	55		55

Background: **Corvid Uplift**
Faction: **Argonaut**
Morph: **Synth**
Motivations: **+Curiosity +Open Source –Patience**

TRAITS
Ego: Danger Sense, Hoarder, Phobia Disorder (Claustrophobia), Social Stigma (Uplift), Submissive

REP
r-rep: 60
x-rep: 40

EQUIPMENT
Armor: Synth Shell + Industrial Armor w/ Fireproofing [18/16, +10 vs. heat/fire] ■
Primary Weapon: Plasma Cutter ■
Starting Credit: 5,450 ■
Enhancements: Access Jacks, Basic Mesh Inserts, Chemical Sniffer, Cortical Stack, Cyberbrain, Eidetic Memory, Electrical Sense, Enhanced Hearing, Enhanced Smell, Enhanced Vision, Industrial Armor, Math Boost, Medichines, Memory Lock, Mnemonic Augmentation, Nanophages, Nanoscopic Vision, Polarization Vision, Puppet Sock, Radiation Sense, T-Ray Emitter ■
Gear: Adaptive Interface, Backup Insurance (1 month), Cleaner Nanoswarm, Creepy Bot, Disassembler Nanoswarm, Disassembly Tools, Faraday Container, Fibereye, Flying Vest, Fractal Gloves, Holographic Projectors, Maker, Motes, Muse, Nanodetectors, Portable Sensor, Repair Spray (2), Specimen Container, Stunner, Tool kit, Utilitool ■
Extra Morph: Case morph with 2 Extra Limbs

Transhumanity's only advantage in a cold, hard universe is that they are tool users. The more tools they have, the easier they can craft the universe to their liking. Your goal is to make these tools available to everyone. You started by taking corporate proprietary designs and prototypes, reverse-engineering them to make reproducible open-source versions. Now you apply those same skills to technology recovered from xenoarcheological digs and trades with the Factors. You study it, take it apart, figure out how it works and how to copy it, and hope not to die in the process. You tend to keep at least one extra cheap morph on hand, which you use when working with the dangerous stuff. ■

"If you don't try it, how will you ever know if it works?"

EXOTECH RISK SPECIALIST

APTITUDES

	COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM	WIL
Base	10	15	20	20	10	20	10
Morph Bonus		5		5	5	10	5
Total	10	20	20	25	15	30	15

STATS

MOX	TT	LUC	IR	WT	DUR	DR	INIT	SPD
2	6	30	60	10	50	75	9	1 (2)

SKILLS

	APT	BASE	MORPH BONUS	TOTAL
Academics: Exotech	COG	70		70
Academics: Nanotechnology	COG	50		50
Art: Writing	INT	70		70
Deception	SAV	40	5	45
Fray	REF	50	5	55
Hardware: Robotics	COG	40		40
Infiltration	COO	55	5	60
Infosec	COG	60		60
Interfacing (Tacnet)	COG	45 (55)		45 (55)
Investigation	INT	40	(10)	40 (50)
Kinesics	SAV	55	5	60
Kinetic Weapons	COO	50	5	55
Language: Native Chechen	INT	90		90
Language: Russian	INT	60		60
Networking: Gatecrashers	SAV	30	5	35
Networking: Hypercorps	SAV	60	5	65
Perception	INT	40	(20)	40 (60)
Profession: Containment Protocols	COG	60		60
Profession: Public Relations	COG	60		60
Profession: Spycraft	COG	50		50
Protocol	SAV	50	5	55
Psychosurgery	INT	60		60
Research	COG	50		50
Unarmed Combat (Implants)	SOM	40 (50)	10	50 (60)

Background: **Indenture**
Faction: **Belter**
Morph: **Fury**
Motivations: **+ExoTech Interests +Wealth –Risks**

TRAITS

Ego: Botched Merge, Debt (Level 2), Edited Memories, Ego Plasticity (Level 2)

REP

c-rep: 50

EQUIPMENT

Armor: Bioweave Armor (Light) + Second Skin + Smart Skin + Armor Vest + Armor Clothing (w/ Chameleon Coating, Self-Healing, Thermal Dampening) [15/18] ■

Primary Weapon: Submachine Rail Gun (w/ Flash Suppressor, Silencer, 200 AP rounds) ■

Starting Credit: 0 ■

Implants: Anti-Glare, Basic Biomods, Basic Mesh Inserts, Claws (w/ Poison Glands, BTX), Cortical Stack, Dead Switch, Direction Sense, Echolocation, Enhanced Hearing, Enhanced Smell, Enhanced Vision, Ghostrider Module, Medichines, Multi-Tasking, Nanophages, Neurachem (Level 1), Oracles, Oxygen Reserve, Toxin Filters, T-Ray Emitter, Vision Filter ■

Gear: AR Illusion Software, Backup Insurance, Behavioral Psych Software, Cleaners Nanoswarm (2), Covert Ops Tool, Cuffband, Dazzler, Encryption Software, Exploit Software, Facial/Image Recognition Software, Fibereye, Firewall Software, Gas/Smoke Grenade (4), Guardian Angel Bots (2, each w/ Light Pistol, 50 Hollow-Point rounds, 5 Bug rounds, 50 Homing RAP rounds, 5 Jammer rounds), Holographic Projectors, Kinesics Software, Laser/Microwave Link, Lens Spotter, MRDR (2 doses), Muse, Nanodetectors, Portable Sensor, Probability Mapping Software, Psi Jammer, Radio Booster, Relationship Mapping Software, Specimen Container, Tactical Network Software, Thermobaric Grenade (2), Toolkit, Tracking Software, Utilitool, Viewers, White Noise Machine ■

You owe your life to ExoTech. You know it's true; you've seen the bills. Now you work off your debt by containing threats to the public image. You and your team, primarily made up of your own forks, are tasked with tracking down and remediating any individuals or releases of technology which might reflect poorly on the corporation. Ideally you do this through legal means, but you are authorized to use force when necessary. Some might describe you as heartless, but that's not true. You just have a highly competitive, long-term self-investment portfolio. ■

"We're with the company and we're here to help."

HYPERCORP FIRST-CONTACT SPECIALIST

APTITUDES

	COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM	WIL
Base	20	10	25	10	25	10	15
Morph Bonus	5		5		5	10	5
Total	25	10	30	10	30	20	20

STATS

MOX	TT	LUC	IR	WT	DUR	DR	INIT	SPD
3	8	40	80	8	40	60	8	1

SKILLS

	APT	BASE	MORPH BONUS	TOTAL
Academics: Exopsychology	COG	60	5	65
Academics: Mathematics	COG	50	5	55
Academics: Philosophy	COG	40	5	45
Academics: Psychology	COG	70	5	75
Climbing	SOM	10	10 (40)	20 (50)
Deception	SAV	65	5 (35)	70 (100)
Disguise	INT	45	5	50
Freerunning	SOM	45	10	55
Impersonation	SAV	25	5 (35)	30 (60)
Infiltration	COO	65	(20)	65 (85)
Intimidation	SAV	45	5	50
Investigation	INT	50	5	55
Kinesics	SAV	60	5	65
Kinetic Weapons	COO	65		65
Language: Native Korean	INT	95	5	100
Language: German	INT	35	5	40
Language: Mandarin	INT	35	5	40
Language: Neo-Cetacean	INT	45	5	50
Language: Tamil	INT	35	5	40
Networking: Gatecrashers	SAV	45	5	50
Networking: Hypercorp	SAV	80	5	75
Perception	INT	45	5 (25)	50 (70)
Persuasion	SAV	60	5 (15)	65 (75)
Profession: Communications	COG	70	5	75
Profession: Survival	COG	60	5	65
Protocol	SAV	55	5	60
Spray Weapons	COO	60		60

Background: **Hyperelite**
Faction: **Hypercorp**
Morph: **Crasher**
Motivations: **+Novelty +Stimulation –Self-restraint**

TRAITS
Ego: Addiction (Alpha, Moderate), Enemy (Slighted Competitor), Immortality Blues (Level 1)

REP
c-rep: 80
x-rep: 30

EQUIPMENT
Armor: Bioweave Armor (Light) + Smart Skin + Smart Vacsuit (Standard w/ Immunogenic System, Offensive Armor, Thermal Dampening) [12/12] ■
Primary Weapon: Heavy Pistol w/ Gyromount, Imaging Scope, Smart Magazine (20 Laser-Guided Hollow-Point rounds, 20 Laser-Guided Zap rounds) ■
Starting Credit: 3,600 ■

Implants: Basic Biomods, Basic Mesh Inserts, Bioweave Armor (Light), Chameleon Skin, Circadian Regulation, Clean Metabolism, Cortical Stack, Direction Sense, Echolocation, Eidetic Memory, Emotional Dampers, Enhanced Hearing, Enhanced Pheromones, Enhanced Respiration, Enhanced Smell, Enhanced Vision, Hyper Linguist, Grip Pads, Low-Pressure Tolerance, Life Recorder, Math Boost, Medichines, Memory Lock, Multitasking, Nanophages, Oxygen Reserve, Poison Glands (Flight), Radiation Tolerance, Smell Filter, Temperature Tolerance, Toxin Filters, Vacuum Sealing ■
Gear: Alpha (5 doses), Automatic Rifle Railgun (w/ Gyromount, Imaging Scope, Smart Magazine, 100 rounds), Backup Insurance (1 month), Behavioral Psych Software, Breadcrumb Positioning, Comfurt (5 doses), Covert Ops Tool, Electronic Rope, Emergency Rations, Engineer Nanoswarm, Facial/Image Recognition Software, Filter Straw, Flashlight, Invisibility Cloak, Kinesics Software, Low-Capacity Qubit Reservoir, Mission Recorder, Muse, Nanobandages (4), Portable QE Comm, Portable Solarchive, Portable Sensor, Radio Beacon, Radio Booster, Recon Flyer, Saboteur Nanoswarm, Scout Missile, Shelter Dome, Shredder, Small Oxygen Candles, Servitor Bot, Solar Recharger, Utilitool, White Noise Machine ■

There's nothing new under this sun, which is why you've started looking under others. After two-hundred years, you've sampled every gender and race. Now you work with the same hypercorps you once helped build to seek out those things you've never had a chance to see before: extraterrestrials. For you, the excitement and novelty of understanding an alien mindset is the ultimate payout. Of course, the paycheck for securing exclusive trading rights or exploiting virgin exoplanets certainly helps sweeten things. ■

"This is curious."

INSURGENT RECLAIMER

APTITUDES

	COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM	WIL
Base	10	20	15	20	5	20	15
Morph Bonus		5		(10)		5	
Total	10	25	15	20 (30)	5	25	15

STATS

MOX	TT	LUC	IR	WT	DUR	DR	INIT	SPD
3	6	30	60	7 (9)	35 (45)	68	7 (9)	1 (2)

SKILLS

	APT	BASE	MORPH BONUS	TOTAL
Academics: Ecology	COG	50		50
Animal Handling	SAV	40		40
Art: Poetry	INT	50		50
Climbing	SOM	45	5	50
Demolitions	COG	50		50
Fray	REF	65	(10)	65 (75)
Freerunning	SOM	45	5	50
Infiltration	COO	55	5 (25)	60 (80)
Interest: Koran	COG	60		60
Intimidation	SAV	40		40
Kinetic Weapons	COO	70	5	75
Language: Native Arabic	INT	85		85
Medicine: Paramedic	COG	60		60
Networking: Ecologists	SAV	50	(–10)	50 (40)
Networking: Hypercorps	SAV	35	(–10)	35 (25)
Perception	INT	40	(20)	40 (60)
Persuasion	SAV	60	(–10)	60 (50)
Pilot: Groundcraft	REF	60	(10)	60 (70)
Profession: Imam	COG	60		60
Profession: Resistance	COG	55		55
Profession: Survival	COG	75		75
Scrounging	INT	70		70
Thrown Weapons	COO	50	5	55

Background: **Martian**
Faction: **Barsoomian**
Morph: **Ruster**
Motivations: **+Community +Faith –Greed**

TRAITS

Morph: Aggressive GRM, Improved Immune System (Level 1), Tough (Level 2), Unattractive (Level 1)

REP

c-rep: 40
e-rep: 60

EQUIPMENT

Armor: Bioweave Armor (Light) + Second Skin + Armor Vest + Armor Clothing (w/ Chameleon Coating, Thermal Dampening) + Light Helmet [14/18] ■

Primary Weapon: SMG w/ 100 regular rounds, 100 AP rounds ■
Starting Credit: 2,200 ■
Implants: Adrenal Boost, Basic Biomods, Basic Mesh Inserts, Bioweave Armor (Light), Chameleon Skin, Cortical Stack, Direction Sense, Electrical Sense, Enhanced Hearing, Enhanced Respiration, Enhanced Smell, Enhanced Vision, Medichines, Neurachem (Level 1), Radiation Sense, T-Ray Emitter, Temperature Tolerance ■

Gear: Backup Insurance (1 month), Cleaner Nanoswarm, Disassembly Tools, Electronic Rope, EMP Grenade, Fabber, Firewall Software, Flashlight, Mars Buggy, Muse, Nanobandage (5), Nanodetectors, Plasmaburst Grenade (2), Pressure Tent (2 person), Radio Beacon, Radio Booster, Repair Spray, Rust Hound, Smart Anchors, Smart Rat, Sniper Rifle (w/Imaging Scope, 60 AP rounds), Solar Recharger, Specs, Superthermite Charges (2), Survival Cold Weather Gear, Utilitool, Viewers ■

Humanity has toppled under its own hubris. Now you and your Islamic family work to re-establish justice, wisdom, and honesty the only place you can: the deserts of Mars. You live in the shadow of Qurain, nomads competing with the TITANs to the south and the hypercorps to the west. But you do survive, and even thrive in territory too hostile for interlopers to pursue you. You protect your family and your culture, and you keep the faith that one day things will be better. ■

"Four things support the world: the learning of the wise, the justice of the great, the prayers of the good, and the valor of the brave."

JOVIAN CBEAT SCIENTIST

APTITUDES

	COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM	WIL
Base	20	10	10	15	15	15	20
Morph Bonus						(10)	
Total	20	10	10	15	15	15 (25)	20

STATS

MOX	TT	LUC	IR	WT	DUR	DR	INIT	SPD
3	8	40	80	6	30	45	5	1 (3)

SKILLS

	APT	BASE	MORPH BONUS	TOTAL
Academics: Exotech	COG	60		60
Academics: Nanotechnology	COG	70		70
Academics: Psychology	COG	45		45
Beam Weapons	COO	60		60
Clubs	SOM	60	10	70
Deception	SAV	45		45
Demolitions	COG	45		45
Fray (Ranged)	REF	55 (65)		55 (65)
Hardware: Aerospace	COG	40		40
Hardware: Robotics	COG	60		60
Infosec	COG	65		65
Interest: Gatecrashing	COG	40		40
Interest: Pre-Fall Cinema	COG	50		50
Interest: Service Organizations	COG	40		40
Interest: TITAN Technology	COG	60		60
Interfacing	COG	40		40
Intimidation	SAV	45		45
Investigation	INT	60		60
Language: Native Spanish	INT	80		80
Navigation	INT	60		60
Networking: Hypercorps	SAV	35		35
Networking: Media	SAV	35		35
Pilot: Aircraft	REF	40		40
Pilot: Spacecraft	REF	50		50
Profession: Containment Procedures	COG	60		60
Profession: Naval Tactics	COG	50		50
Protocol	SAV	45		45
Research	COG	60		60
Scrounging	INT	50		50

Background:
Original Space Colonist
Faction: **Jovian**
Morph: **Flat**
Motivations: **+Loyalty +Safety –Transparency**

TRAITS
Ego: Allies (Level 1)

REP
c-rep: 60
f-rep: 40
r-rep: 20

EQUIPMENT
Armor: Armor Clothing + Second Skin + Smart Skin [7/9] ■
Primary Weapon: Microwave Agonizer (w/ Imaging Scope) ■
Starting Credit: 200 ■
Implants: Cyberlimb Plus, Muscle Augmentation, Neurachem (Level 2) ■
Gear: Ecto, EMP Grenades (2), Fractal Gloves, High Explosive Grenades (2), Klar (2 doses), Liquid Thermite (2), Mobile Lab, Muse, Nanodetectors, Portable Sensor, Scrapper's Gel (2), Shock Gloves, Specimen Container, Specs, Standard Vacsuit (Farady mod), Superthermite Charges (5), Tool Kit, Utilitool ■

You are the front-line against the TITANs 2.0. The solar system is trapped in a positive feedback loop of undirected technological evolution. Only the Republic and a handful of fringe habitats are creating fortifications against the next outbreak, and you man those ramparts. While CBEAT primarily researches technology to determine safety restrictions, your charge is a little more forward-thinking: investigate those technologies that will never be authorized for use to understand how they work, how they will evolve, and how to defeat them. You were hired for your loyalty to the Republic and her people; a responsibility you will take with you to your grave. ■

"To fight the monster you must know it."

TITANIAN SCIENCE POLICE INSPECTOR

APTITUDES

	COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM	WIL
Base	15	20	25	10	20	15	20
Morph Bonus	5		10	5			5
Total	20	20	35	15	20	15	25

STATS

MOX	TT	LUC	IR	WT	DUR	DR	INIT	SPD
4	10	50	100	7	35	53	10	1

SKILLS

	APT	BASE	MORPH BONUS	TOTAL
Academics: Oceanography (Methane Hydrography)	COG	75 (85)	5	80 (90)
Academics: Psychology (Criminology)	COG	55 (65)	5	60 (70)
Art: Sculpture	INT	45	10	55
Clubs	SOM	55		55
Deception	SAV	30		30
Fray	REF	50	5	55
Free Fall	REF	30	5	35
Freerunning	SOM	35		35
Interest: Microcorp Research Projects	COG	50	5	55`
Interfacing	COG	35	5	40
Investigation	INT	65	10 (20)	75 (85)
Kinesics	SAV	55		55
Kinetic Weapons	COO	55		55
Language: Native Swedish	INT	95	10	105
Language: French	INT	50	10	60
Networking: Autonomists	SAV	55		55
Networking: Criminals	SAV	35		35
Networking: Scientists	SAV	35		35
Perception	INT	50	10	60
Pilot: Aircraft	REF	30	5	35
Pilot: Groundcraft	REF	30	5	35
Profession: Field Scientist	COG	50	5	55
Profession: Forensics	COG	50	5	55
Profession: Police Procedures	COG	50	5	55
Programming	COG	30	5	35
Research	COG	45	5	50
Scrounging	INT	35	10	45

Background: **Fall Evacuee**
Faction: **Titanian**
Morph: **Observer**
Motivations: **+Social Democracy, +Techno-Progressivism, –Singularity Seeking**

TRAITS
Ego: Mental Disorder (Cosmic Anxiety)

REP
@-rep: 30
g-rep: 30
r-rep: 50

EQUIPMENT
Armor: Second Skin, Smart Vac Suit [8/10] ■
Primary Weapon: Medium Rail Pistol (w/ 100 rounds) ■
Starting Credit: 1,500 ■

Implants: Basic Biomods, Basic Mesh Inserts, Cortical Stack, Emotional Dampers, Enhanced Hearing, Enhanced Smell, Enhanced Vision, Medichines, Mnemonic Augmentation, Oracles, Temperature Tolerance (Cold), T-Ray Emitter ■
Gear: Backup Insurance (1 month), Comfurt (2 doses), Cuffband, Fractal Gloves, Kinesics Software, Muse, Shock Baton, Smart Dust, Tracking Software ■

You escaped Sweden for Titan during the Fall as an egocast and got fast-tracked for a morph by volunteering for a term in the civil service. You had been a post-doc student using remote probes to perform hydrographic surveys of Titan's methane lakes—from your office on Earth. You ended up assigned to the militia and later transferred to the police. Your past life as a scientist won you a posting to the Science Police, where you've climbed to the rank of Inspector. Ever since a run-in with an exsurgent, you've been coping with a dread of encountering other alien horrors. ■

"I've seen this pattern of gradue before—but never from nanoscale wounds on a corpse. The victim appears to have committed suicide by reprogramming a gardener nanoswarm. But why?"

ULTIMATE PURIFIER

APTITUDES

	COG	COO	INT	REF	SAV	SOM	WIL
Base	5	30	10	30	5	25	15
Morph Bonus	10	5		5	5	10	
Total	15	35	10	35	10	35	15

STATS

MOX	TT	LUC	IR	WT	DUR	DR	INIT	SPD
1	6	30	60	8	40	60	9	1 (3)

SKILLS

	APT	BASE	MORPH BONUS	TOTAL
Academics: Philosophy	COG	50	10	60
Art: Meditation	INT	35		35
Blades	SOM	65	10	75
Deception (Bluffing)	SAV	30 (40)	5	35 (45)
Demolitions	COG	40	10	50
Fray (Ranged)	REF	65 (75)	5	70 (80)
Free Fall	REF	50	5	55
Freerunning	SOM	40	10	50
Gunnery	INT	60		60
Infosec (Security)	COG	60 (70)	5	65 (75)
Interest: Exhumans	COG	50	10	60
Interest: Implant Technology	COG	45	10	55
Kinetic Weapons	COO	60	5	65
Language: Native Urdu	INT	80		80
Language: English	INT	60		60
Medicine: Paramedic	COG	45	10	55
Networking: Ultimates	SAV	35	5	40
Perception	INT	50	5 (25)	55 (75)
Profession: Security Ops	COG	55	10	65
Profession: Squad Tactics	COG	50	10	60
Seeker Weapons	COO	70	5	75
Thrown Weapons	COO	45	5	50

Background: **Isolate**
Faction: **Ultimate**
Morph: **Remade**
Motivations: **+Achievement +Challenges +Honor**

TRAITS
Ego: Enemy (Exhumans), Mental Disorder (Borderline Personality Disorder)
Morph: Uncanny Valley

REP
u-rep: 40

EQUIPMENT
Armor: Bioweave Armor (Heavy) + Full Helmet + Heavy Body Armor (w/ Chameleon Coating, Immunogenic System, Offensive Armor, Reactive Coating, Self-Healing, Shock Proof) [24/25] ■
Primary Weapon: Automatic Rifle Railgun w/ Extended Magazine, Imaging Scope, Laser Sight, Silencer, Smart Magazine, Underbarrel Seeker Launcher (100 Homing AP rounds, 200 Homing regular rounds, 10 Gas/Smoke micromissiles, 5 EMP micromissiles, 5 Frag micromissiles) ■
Starting Credit: 1,150 ■
Implants: Anti-Glare, Basic Biomods, Basic Mesh Inserts, Bioweave Armor (Heavy), Circadian Regulation, Clean Metabolism, Cortical Stack, Cyberclaws, Dead Switch, Direction Sense, Echolocation, Eelware, Eidetic Memory, Enhanced Hearing, Enhanced Respiration, Enhanced Smell, Enhanced Vision, Implanted Nanotoxin: Neuropath, Medichines, Nanophages, Neurachem (Level 2), Oxygen Reserve, Radiation Sense, Temperature Tolerance, Toxin Filters, T-Ray Emitter ■
Gear: Backup Insurance (1 month), Disposable Missile Launcher (1 Laser-Guided HEAP Missile), Electronic Rope, Facial/Image Recognition Software, Firewall Software, Liquid Thermite (2), Monofilament Sword, Muse, Nanobandages (5), Nanodetector, Phlo (2 doses), Overload Grenades (4), Radio Booster, Superthermite (2), Tactical Network Software, Thermobaric Grenades (4), Utilitool, Vibroblade ■

You left your old self on the icy crust of the moonlet Paradise. You left your weakness, your self-pity, your fear of tradition. Now you know who you are; a hero tested in the fires of combat, an Overman. You recognize yourself, your hungers, your needs, are tools to be honed. You cherish your reputation for skill in combat and will intentionally hamper yourself to turn every conflict into a worthy test of your skills. You are an Exemplar, recognized for your mastery of weapons and self. You are a Purifier; feared for your skill in the battle of Eris against the exhuman swarms. You are a student, still struggling to reach mastery of self and others. You are Ultimate. ■

"Only our honor survives us."